

NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

VOL XV NO. 1 JAN. 1975



NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDPATCHERS

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A SECOND APPEAL

K.S. Iyankumar.

In July number of Volume XIV appeared my appeal for the declaring of Chilka as a Sanctuary, wilderness area, recreational area and a birdbanding centre all in one. Later, I received a letter from Mr. Zafar Futehally informing me that the Government of Orissa was in fact thinking of developing the Chilka area on approximately the same lines. He further asked me whether I would like to assist in preparing a booklet on the waterfowl of the lake. Correspondence in the matter was started with the Orissa Government, but to date, I have received no reply. I now await the return of Mr. Futehally who, I believe, is somewhere on the other side of the Earth. Now I turn my sights to another part of the country, the Garhwal District of Uttar Pradesh.

In former times when roads were not developed into the Himalayan mountains, pilgrims to the sacred shrines of Kedarnath and Badrinath, had to walk much of the way in manageable "Padavs" or stages. From Rudraprayag of the monaster fame, the pilgrims went up by a bridle path along the lovely Mandakini River. The entire valley is treely beautiful and every turn in the road a delight. Right across the head of the valley is the great bastion of Himalayan peaks with Kedarnath on the west and the breathtaking Badrinath on the east. I propose the entire range be declared a National Park and all the

development in the valley beyond Gupta Kashi on the right bank of the Mandakini and Ukhimath on the left across the river, should be carefully managed with a control on wasteful activities. The area could largely be a sanctuary which would go down well with the holy aura of the place and would be much appreciated both by visitors and the locals. Forestry should be so managed as to develop the quality of the forests and a restriction imposed on increase in grazing. The southern slopes of the main range are not densely populated and it would not be effecting too many people. There are several valleys going up to the glaciers draping the giant mountains which seem to float almost in an ethereal manner above the inhabited valley.

The entire area has a range of forest types from Cheer Pinus longifolia to high altitude oak Quercus sps. Above the forests are broad stands of Rhodendron campanulatum and beyond these the alpine meadows or "udians" with dwarf junipers and lovely flowers. Above these are the crags writhes in mists and the eternal snows. Much of this area is difficult of access and the geographical restrictions should be augmented by Government regulations whereby visitors may enter only for scientific reasons. The sacred shrines of Kedarnath 11,750' and Madhyamashwar would be centres for visitors from where parties could go up into higher altitudes for rock and snow craft and to get to know the vegetation and fauna of the higher altitudes.

A little above Ukhimath there is a lovely tarn which could have a small tourist centre and then to the east is the bold 13,000' Tungnath mountain which would form the eastern part of the proposed Himalayan wilderness recreational area. This mountain has, or had, a magnificent forest of oak, and other broad-leaved trees, and higher up spruce and fir. I can confidently say that this mountain isolated from the main range and rising above the lower ranges and with two deep valleys on both sides is unique in the views it affords and the fact that the higher precipitation it receives making it a bird paradise. Here there is a lovely forest rest house called Dughalbetta which could be developed into a centre for visitors and from it, paths with gentle gradients could radiate in all directions taking wanderers to various altitudes from 5,000' to 13,000' providing invaluable opportunities of getting familiarised with various altitudinal zonation of vegetation and resulting bird-life. This mountain should be completely preserved from all forms of exploitation and cultivation or grazing should not be permitted to increase, rather the few hamlets which do exist over the entire area and on this mountain in particular should be absorbed into the new development so that they may provide the necessary shelter for the tourists and guides for those wanting to go into the higher valleys of the main range. Tungnath itself is of religious significance.

3



The north side of the main range is occupied by uninhabited glaciers of Gangotry opening into the Bhagirathi watershed and the Satopanth Glacier into the Alakananda watershed and these could become a high altitude sanctuary for mountain sheep and other Himalayan game.

There is now a road right upto Gupta Kashi and from there another road goes across the Mandakini to Ukhimath and then over the shoulder of the Tungnath mountain on to the otherside to the district headquarters town of Chamoli. It would thus be possible to easily get people into the valley and make it a richly rewarding area to spend a short holiday. The northern glaciers would be approachable from the west by Gangotri and from the east by Badrinath. In passing I may just draw attention to the fact that all the place names I have taken are sanctified by centuries of faith. The Mandakini valley is the least sensitive of the Himalayan region since no routes lead through to Tibet and as such it is not worth being declared out of bounds even for foreigners.

* * * *

Our Cover:

Our cover illustration for 1975 is drawn by copying a fine action photograph by Mr. T. Koneri Rao. It is very difficult to photograph birds in flight as a wide angled lense would reduce the size of the object and a telephoto cannot accept high angular velocities. There are further complications of selecting correct filters and getting the light to fall on the bird.

The bird is a Gull-billed Tern (Gelochelidon nilotica) in winter plumage.

Last year's cover was made possible when a pair of bulbuls raided my custard apple tree. Very little of the custard apple was left by the time the preliminary lines of the sketch were completed.

Original photographs and sketches will be greatly appreciated if made available for reproduction in the Newsletter.

- Ed.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON CHICK REARING IN THE
WHITE HEADED BABBLER (TURDOIDES AFFINIS).

D.E.P. Jayasingh.

In September 1971, I had the opportunity of watching, with the help of binoculars, a nest of the White-headed Babbler. During the course of these observations, which lasted from the 16th September to the 1st October 1971, I happened to mention it to Dr. P.J. Sanjeevaraj, professor of Zoology in the college where I teach, and he gave me, together with his encouragement, a reprint of his article entitled "~~Commercial~~ Breeding in the White-headed Babbler Turdoides affinis (Jerdon)" in Tambaram, Madras State" published in the Journ. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. Vol. 61(1) pp 181-183, 1964. I jotted down my observations on the back of this reprint and quite forgot about it till I happened to look it up again a few days ago. I am struck by the exact correspondence between the dates he notifies on the hatching of the eggs, the growth of the chicks etc. and my own observations of these events. It appears that in our college campus, the White-headed Babbler breeds during the later half of the month of September, and by the beginning of October, the chicks abandon the nests and fly off with the adult birds. Thus, the whole development, from the hatching of the eggs to the time the fledglings fly away, takes place in about 14 days.

One observation that I have made has not been recorded by the above mentioned author. This pertains to a sort of reciprocal 'feeding' of the adults by the chicks. I will return to a discussion of this phenomenon in a moment. Let us first give my observational notes.

- 16th Sept. '71 - Nest noticed on Neem tree in back garden.
Four blue eggs.
- 18th - 3 eggs hatched. Order of hatching not observed. Eyes of chicks remain closed. Movement of branches of tree cause chicks to open their mouths expecting to be fed.
- 19th - 4th egg also hatched.
- 20th - Chicks growing rapidly. Eyes still closed.
- 21st - Only 3 chicks present. Chicks have developed fine greyish feathers along the edge of the wings. From about 2.15 p.m. the bird which fed the chicks sat in the nest for nearly half an hour. This again happened at about

4.15 p.m. Two birds were seen feeding the young. Possibly there are more than two doing this job. Worms and brown coloured grass hoppers were noticed as feed. At night, the bird sitting in the nest was marked by squirting red ink, with an ink-filler, on to its head.

- 22nd - There are definitely at least three birds feeding the chicks as could be made out by the marked bird. Feathers developed on wings and back of chicks. Eyes still closed.
- 23rd - It rained in the morning. An adult bird, other than the one that was marked, sat in the nest giving protection to the chicks. but now and then it would leave the nest in order to bring food and at these intervals the chicks got drenched. Eyes of chicks appeared to be partially opened.
- 24th - Only two chicks in the nest. Chicks become active only when the nest was touched and not when the branches were shaken as observed earlier.
- 25th - Chicks have grown to the size of newly hatched poultry chicks. Eyes are fully open. The marked bird and others of the gang have started moving farther away from the nest, in search of feed, than they had on previous days (they were noticed in the front garden). The adult bird which fed the chicks was seen to swallow the faeces of the chicks as they defecated. The faeces was a solid, elongated globule, white in colour with a black end that came out last. The adult swallowed it right away.
- 26th - The chicks were found fallen down and the nest toppled. They were picked up and put back in the nest which was set in position and fastened with strings. Red plastic strips were fastened to the legs of the chicks with the help of a stapler to serve as streamers. The chicks were big enough now to stretch their wings and preen themselves.
- 27th - The chicks look more like babblers now. Feeding by the marked bird and others of the gang continues.

- 29th - The two chicks were seen perched on the rim of the nest in the morning.
- 30th - Chicks not in the nest.
- 1st Oct. '71 - The two fledglings were noticed on a tree nearby. They were perched fairly high up on a branch. One had the red streamer attached to its leg. The other chick was sitting in a position that made it difficult to observe its legs. However, by its size and its proximity to the other chick it was possible to guess that it belonged to the same brood.

As noted on the 25th instant, the bird which fed the young was seen to swallow the faeces expelled by the chicks. I took special care to see whether the faeces was taken and thrown elsewhere by the adult feeder bird. But this was not so. I could distinctly see through the binoculars the movement of the gullet of the feeder bird and I am sure the globule of faeces went down its throat. I even noticed the feeder bird waiting for a moment after dropping the feed into the wide open mouth of the chick to get this 'reward' (if it may so be termed) which was excreted by the chick by a slight tilt of its rear end. This behaviour seems to ensure two things at the same time. One, it helps to keep the nest clear of the droppings of the chicks; and two, it probably helps to fill the belly of the feeder bird which must be spending a lot of its energy in obtaining food for the young, giving much of what it picks, itself eating very little. I do not know how well this phenomenon is known. I venture to speculate that this habit could have developed in some birds through natural selection to prevent the waste of nourishment that probably go undigested in the alimentary canal of the chicks either due to excess of food or due to the difference in the digestive physiology of the young compared to that of the adult. I have reasons to believe that this kind of 'faeces feeding' is also present in the weaver birds which I had the opportunity of observing for the past two years.

* * * *

THE PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD

K.K. Neelakantan.

Brother Navarro's comments on the Purplerumped Sunbird reminded me of some incidents recently witnessed. On 27.10.1974 a female Purplerumped Sunbird which had discovered a small ball of surgical cotton lying on the ground made a number of vain attempts to carry it off. Though it could not have been either the size or the weight of the mass of cotton that had foiled the bird's attempts to bear it away, I pulled the ball to pieces and scattered the pieces about. Soon the bird returned and, one by one, took away two or three of the pieces. Then she seemed to lose interest in the cotton and started collecting the 'silk' from leaf-nests of the red ant. The next morning, however, she carried off two more pieces of cotton. She was constantly accompanied by the male whose sole functions appeared to be providing moral support and vocal encouragement.

A few weeks ago a neighbour gave my daughter a deserted sunbird-nest. This we suspended from the eaves close to a hibiscus bush regularly visited by sunbirds. At 8.00 a.m. on 26.11.1974 a female Purplerumped Sunbird was seen pulling out the soft lining of this derelict nest. The lining consisted of large, soft down-feathers with a slight admixture of silk-cotton. The bird was taking only one feather at a time. Some ten to fifteen visits later what remained of the lining fell to the ground. It remained a compact mass though a few small feathers had floated off and were clinging to the wall and the vegetation. The sunbird now began collecting the scattered feathers, taking away only one at a time. Just once she actually alighted on the ground close to the large mass of feathers, worried it until many of the feathers were detached, picked up one feather and flew off. Till 9.20 she went on transporting one feather after another to her nest somewhere in the neighbouring compound.

Between 9.30 and 12.30 she paid many more visits to our backyard, but, ignoring the remaining feathers, always went to the 'shell' of the nest to take only long strands of fibre or tiny blobs of cotton.

These incidents also illustrate the resourcefulness of a nesting Purplerumped Sunbird. The second incident suggests that one individual at least has somehow hit upon a very economical method of obtaining nest material.

* * * * *

EDITORIAL:

Annual General Meeting:

The Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India has to be postponed to March 1975 for unavoidable reasons. Members who had been attending these meetings for the last decade or more will recall with nostalgia the beautiful garden adjoining the picturesque residence of Mr. Zafar Futehally. Even as each meeting progressed Golden Orioles flitted from mango tree to mango tree. Also after the departure of Mr. Futehally to Bangalore, this house and the garden have been torn down and replaced with a multi-storeyed block !

Meanwhile, Dr. Salim Ali has invited us to hold the meeting in the ~~lawn~~ in front of his house in Pali Hill. Although surrounded by concrete monsters this little green patch will remain, we hope, for some time. Dr. Salim Ali has also kindly consented to preside over the meeting. As Dr. Salim Ali will be out of town during the whole of February the meeting will have to be held in March. The exact date and time of the meeting and instructions for getting there will be given in the February issue.

- Ed.

* * * * *

CORRESPONDENCE:

A Whiteheaded Duck.

I was visiting the Delhi Zoological Park at New Delhi on the 19th November, 1974 and while going round the main wildfowl pond, I noticed among the many ducks, almost all wild, a duck with a completely white head. I drew the attention of the Zoo Director and his Assistant and then came the next day with my binoculars to see it again. It was there, among Shovelers and Pintail and allowed close approach to about 12 meters. I had no doubt that it was a Shoveler (Anas clypeata) drake with a complete white head and a salmon pink bill mottled brown on the dorsal ridge or culmen. The eyes appeared dark and unlike the yellow of the male shoveler. But the iris was not distinct. It was not yet in full plumage and the rest of the shovelers were still in semi eclipse plumage as were Pintail. The duck was conspicuous amidst the large groups of ducks. I hope members of the Delhi Birdwatching Society take a look of this unusual duck while it is with us.

R.S. Tharmakumarsinhji.

* * * * *

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THE CRIMSONBREASTED BARBET (Megalaima haemacephala)
NESTING IN BANGALORE.

Abraham Verghese & P.M. Govindakrishnan.

While on a routine 'Birding Trek' in the campus of our college (University of Agricultural Sciences, Hebbal) on February 1, 1974 we encountered a crimsonbreasted barbet engaged in building (rather excavating) a nest. Realizing that this was the barbet's nesting season, we searched for more nests and came across a few, some occupied and some not. We then selected two of these nests for the purpose of our observations and the results of our studies are presented below.

The nest hole that we had first spotted was situated on a dead stubby branch of a Rain Tree (Enterolobium saman). The pair of barbets excavating this nest toiled all through the day upto February 23, when they were noted to have started incubating. However, this pair was not able to raise a successful brood. It was interesting to note that pariah kites (Milvus migrans), white scavenger vultures (Neophron percnopterus), black drongos (Dicrurus adsimilis), jungle crows (Corvus macrorhynchos) and house crows (Corvus splendens) which approached the nest fairly closely did not cause any disturbance to the excavating barbets. On one occasion only,

we watched one of the barbets driving off an inquisitive myna (Acridotheres tristis) with an aggressive "che-e-rrk".

On February 15, we spotted another pair of barbets nesting on a 'living' and apparently healthy branch of the Bead Tree (Melia azedarach) which is a popular exotic in southern Europe, on account of the beautiful rosaries made from its seeds by the monks in monasteries there. The entrance hole was not exactly on the underside of the branch but a little to the side. On the opposite branch of the same tree a pair of small Green Barbets (Megalaima viridis) were nesting. The tree was surrounded by houses and gardens but the barbets were not affected by the noisy atmosphere. For us this was advantageous in that it permitted observation of the nest from a few yards only without causing the birds much concern.

This pair started incubating on February 18. Both sexes were noted to brood the eggs at regular intervals of ten minutes or so in the earlier stages which extended to twenty minutes or more in the later portion of the incubation period. Relieving of one bird by the other was a very interesting process. The non-incubating bird starts calling when it is to take over incubation and is replied to by the incubating bird by coming out of the nest on to an adjacent branch and preening itself beside the reliever. At times both birds would then go on calling simultaneously, this whole process lasting for just over a minute or two culminating when the relieving bird would enter the nest hole. We would like to mention here that Mr. V. Ravi in his note on "A Coppersmith's Brood" / Newsletter 6(1): 4/, writes "..... the female was on duty most of the time, the male once in a while only." Later on he goes to state: "On the day previous to the hatching of eggs the male, which was all along absent was noticeable near the nest." Mr. Ravi's findings seem to contradict our observations. We found that both sexes are equally responsible for incubation.

To resume our account, we found that the incubating bird would put its head out of the nest hole every two or three minutes, keep it out for twenty to thirty seconds, and then withdraw it into the hole. The small Green Barbet however, keeps its head out for more than three minutes. This may be due to the fact that being larger birds, small green barbets need a greater quantity of fresh air and also probably because the strain of stretching the neck out is lesser.

The first sign of feeding was seen on March 5 which meant that the eggs had hatched. This meant that the incubation period was about fifteen days (February 18 to March 4). Feeding was not clear cut for the first four days as we saw the bird entering the nest with a berry and coming out with the same. On

March 9 we noted for the first time the barbet removing faecal pellets from the nest.

Thereafter feeding was more regular and the birds brought food for the nestlings every two minutes on an average. The food usually consisted of berries of the Banyan Tree (Ficus benghalensis) and these were squashed into smaller pieces before feeding. At times the parent birds interrupted their feeding to drive away intruding birds, mostly the small green barbets, but soon resumed their main task.

The fledgelings left the nest on April 15 after a period of forty days, well before the onset of the monsoon, unlike in Ranchi, where Mrs. Jamal Ara/Newsletter 2 (5): 3/ observed that "the fledgelings leave the nest when monsoon showers drench the land." The fledgelings lacked the crimson patch on the forehead which condition was also reported by Cmdr. N.S. Tyabji/Newsletter 1 (7): 5/-.

The INDIAN HANDBOOK (4: 164) states that "Both sexes share all the domestic chores. Period of incubation undetermined." Mr. Ravi probably the first person to record the incubation period (see above) gives it as 17 days, which tallies fairly well with our own finding of 15 days.

A glance through the published volumes of the excellent INDIAN HANDBOOK reveals that the nidification (breeding biology) of many of our common bird species (not to mention the rarer ones) is almost unknown except for such superficial details as location and structure of the nest, size, colour and number of eggs etc. Except for the laudable and highly detailed studies currently being carried out by Dr. B.S. Lamba (JBBHS 60: 121-133 et seq.) of the Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta, other students of Indian bird biology seem all but evident. If every reader of the NEWSLETTER makes a fairly detailed study of the nesting of just one bird each season and reports it to the others through the pages of our Newsletter just think of the amount of useful and objective ornithological matter we could contribute.

* * * *

BIRDS IN URBAN AREAS

Zafar Futehally.

Since it is almost certain that the human population will be 7,000 million by the year 2,000 as against the 4,000 million of today, several of the larger green areas which are the delight of people today will not be available to our successors. But what is encouraging is that wherever there is some

open space with shrubs, trees and water, birds are invariably found. With proper planning it might be possible for birds and humans to co-exist in the same general habitat. Sometimes birds disappear not because they distrust humans, but simply because they have nowhere to stay, and nothing to eat. Occasionally pollution drives them away. It is well known that many bird species which had disappeared from London for almost 30 years settled down in the city again after atmospheric pollution was abated. The presence of birds, therefore, might indicate the cleanness or otherwise of the human environment. A good project for 1975 would be to keep a tag on the bird life of Bombay, Calcutta and Bangalore, and in fact of as many urban areas as we can, to act as indicators of pollution. Because the metabolism of birds is so much faster than that of humans, they suffer the effects of pollution much quicker than human beings do, and are in a sense advance warning lights for all of us.

In Bombay, as I wrote earlier in this newsletter, I was amazed that the White-breasted Water Hen continued to nest in our suburban garden till last year, in spite of the high rise structures which by then had virtually encircled the compound. The female Paradise Flycatcher was seen on the estate a few weeks ago, while the usual complement of Golden Orioles, White-spotted Fantail Flycatchers and a dozen other species continued to survive - noisy construction activities notwithstanding. The total area of the garden which was 12,400 sq. yards in the grand old days, has shrunk to 6,000 sq. yards today, larger slices of land on either side of the house having succumbed to advancing 'civilisation'. Yet the surviving garden with its many fine trees of Mango, Jamoon, Karanj, Imli, Coconut, Palmyra, Chickoo, Gulmohur, Bombax and others provide the habitat which birds seem to like. The Bombax in between two high buildings on the extreme corner of the compound was visited regularly by Rosy Pastors last February.

Bangalore where I now reside, is fast going the way of Bombay. High rise buildings are coming up, and many splendid single houses with large compounds are being replaced by "subdivisions" and jail like tenements. Even in the one year we have been here, Bangalore has become considerably more congested, and many open areas where I watched birds last December have now been built over.

Yet the variety of bird life which one can see here is quite impressive. In a two hour walk yesterday, within the city limits, I saw Large Green Barbets, Coppersmiths, Grey and White Wagtails, White Eyes, Tailor Birds, Purple-rumped Sunbirds, Large Pied Wagtails, Pied Bushchats, Kestrel, Koals, Golden Orioles, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Black Drongos, Indian Robins, Pariah Kite, Common

Myna, Common Bee-eaters, Red Wattled Lapwing, Little Brown Shrike and House Crows. In Sankey Tank there were over a dozen Coots. Surprisingly there are no other water birds, not even a Dabchick, in spite of the fact that there appears to be plenty of vegetable food in the water. Spotted Doves abound in Bangalore, and they coo away during most of the day, but their cooing ends at the 3rd or the 4th note, and I have never heard them reach the maximum number of six which they are supposed to achieve.

* * * *

UNUSUAL NESTING BY RED-WATTLED LAPWING

S.K. Reeves (Holt, Norfolk).

I was very interested in the Note by Mr. Saxena on the unusual nesting of the Red-wattled Lapwing (Vanellus Indicus), which appeared in the November, 1974 issue of the Newsletter.

It led me to wonder just how unusual it was for this species to nest on buildings. I therefore consulted the literature at my disposal and discovered some interesting facts of which other readers of the Newsletter may care to know.

Salim Ali and Ripley in the Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan say that unusual nesting sites are recorded and mention the flat concrete roof of a residential bungalow in New Delhi and the example brought to the attention of McCann and recorded in Vol. 42, Page 442 of the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society. This nest had been placed on a heap of ballast between two railway tracks in Ghorsana Station Yard (Alwar State). McCann records that the nest contained three eggs and that every time a train came in the bird flew up only to return to its domestic duties immediately the train left. The record does not reveal whether the young were brought off successfully.

Stuart Baker - Nidification of Birds of the Indian Empire, Vol. IV, Page 398 - says that the roofs of houses have often been found occupied by a pair of these birds, and that he was told of a pair which nested annually on the roof of an indigo factory.

At page 248 of Vol. 35 of the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society, Stuart Baker records finding a nest containing four eggs of the Burmese race (Atrionuchalis) in the footmark of a huge tiger on a sandbank.

Hume, in that splendid work, 'The Nests and Eggs of Indian Birds' at page 340 et seq., of Vol. 3, gives much information on various sites selected by the bird.

He says that the ballast of a railway is often selected and the nest placed in such a position sometimes that the foot-board of every carriage passes over the bird's head.

He also mentions a hedge-bank and an old brick-kiln.

He says that a pair nested on the top of his flat-roofed two-storied house at Mynpooree and hatched their young there. On the second day he saw the young in his garden and wondered how the parents got them down there - a matter of forty feet.

A Mr. Anderson, so Hume records, knew of a pair of Red-wattled Lapwing which built on the flat roof of the opium cutcherry at Mynpooree.

Whistler - Popular Handbook of India Birds, Page 460 - sounds a melancholy note when he tells us that the bird sometimes places its nests on graves.

Strangely enough, Jerdon, in 'The Birds of India', is completely silent as to the form or site of the nest of this species.

Finally, with regard to the belief, mentioned by Mr. Saxena, that if the Red-wattled Lapwing lays its eggs on high ground the rains that year would be heavy, Dharmakumarsinhji in 'The Birds of Saurashtra', pages 172 and 173, summarily dismisses the belief as being false. He says that the bird does select high ground where there is the likelihood of prennial flooding, for example when close to lakes and creeks. However, despite this, he says that eggs do get washed away when the rains are excessive.

* * * * *

NHAVA ISLAND - BOMBAY HARBOUR

R. Prabhakar Menon.

The unusual nesting by Redwattled Lapwing described by V.S. Saxena (Newsletter, Nov. 1974) reminds me of a similar incident recorded by Malcom Macdonald, the then British High Commissioner in India in his book Birds in the Sun (page 62).

This is about a pair of the same species he had seen nesting on the terrace roof of his house in April 1960 in New Delhi. The nest was a heap of 800 pebbles with a shallow scoop at the centre. The pair deserted the nest before laying eggs, possibly owing to the disturbance caused by the celebrations at the High Commission at the time.

Several days later he found another nest just across the road on the roof of another building. This was made up of 687 bits of broken chips of cement. The birds had started incubating 4 eggs but for some reason could not complete incubation and rear a family just the way Saxena's Lapwings did.

It would be interesting to know whether 1960 was a flood year for Delhi.

* * * *

A S.T. BUSMAN'S BIRDWATCHING FROM RATNAGIRI TO BOMBAY

H.P. Harchekar.

On 30 January 1963 I left Ratnagiri by an Express S.T. Bus at 06.10. It was a cold morning and the sun rose after about 07.00. The first halt was at Gangameshwar after about an hour's run. It was a bit foggy here and the birds were not very active still. However, while I was having a cup of tea at the tea-stall I heard and saw a Magpie Robin in a leafless coral tree calling a plaintive swee-ee-ee-ee. After some time the sun was visible and the fog started clearing and more birds started clearing and more birds started showing themselves up. A mixed party of Spotted and Red Turtle Doves (about 15-20) were sunning with their heads turned and beaks tucked in their wings on a dry branch of a mango tree. Common drongos and Green Bee-eaters were commonly seen on telegraph wires along the route. Swallows, which I made out to be the Common, were present at several points, and at one spot so closely packed on the overhead wire so as to appear as if tangled in one another.

We were approaching the taluka headquarters of Chiplun. Chiplun is situated on a river bank with hills on three sides. The river receives its water from the Koyna Project. Many Whitebreasted and Common Kingfishers were on the banks of this river. The highway runs on one side of the town, and on the other cattle were grazing in the fields, with

their attendants, the Cattle Egrets, closely following them. The duration of the halt was longer here and this allowed me to move about the place for a while. There were Common Mynas around; a Fantailed Flycatcher was busy sallying insects in a roadside garden; a Coppersmith tonked in a peepal, and a Golden Oriole was diligently searching among the mango trees. At the following halt at Khed, about 20 miles from Chiplun birdlife continued to be identical; drongos and bee-eaters predominated. In addition, a Fufousbacked Shrike and two Baybacked were on the wires overhead. At a waterhole where some people were bathing, little egrets and a pond Heron were calmly biding their time on the opposite bank for pouncing on a prey, not very far from the bathers.

The run ahead was a bit tedious owing to many diversions to the older route, as the Bombay-Goa Highway was under repairs. These diversions being through harvested fields presented pipits, and larks. By the time we reached the next halt, the sun was high up having approached the noon, and birdlife dull probably owing to the advanced hours.

The next leg from Mahad to Indapur, birdlife activated itself to my surprise, at least a hundred Indian Rollers or Blue Jays were seen perched along telegraph wires on the route. A few of them appeared harassed by the heat of the day and were sheltering in the shade of porcelain insulators. At many points Whitebreasted Kingfishers and Common Drongos were noticed in their company. The scene continued for a long time until we reached Kolad.

A big waterhole at Kolad, known as Kolad Doha was a picture of the most scenic sight of my run. On its bank stood a dry tree, completely covered and ornamented by egrets in their immaculate white; their reflection in the waters of the waterhole appeared to complete the scenic grandeur of the sight. As if to punctuate the scene a brahminy kite now flew above the water, with some egrets together with Pond Herons scatteredly sitting on the edge, and a Black-bellied variety of Tern constantly kept skimming the water's surface. Here then was a never-to-be-forgotten sight!

The lengthening evening shadows were calling a halt to my birdwatching every minute, and thus brought to an end an eleven-hour spree of birdwatching which had started early that morning.

EDITORIAL:

Readers will be very happy to know that a Birdwatchers Club has been founded in Indore. Some 25 members have been brought together by Dr. P.T. Thomas, Principal, Indore School of Social work.

The members meet once a month at the School of Social work, Old **Sahare** Road. They have discussions, see projected Colour transparencies and have had at least one birdwatching trip to Sirpur Lake, consequent to which a Newsletter was published.

It is probably much easier for like-minded people to get together in smaller towns. Such group activities help to sustain interest and draw more people into the fold.

We wish the Indore Birdwatchers all success in their Club.

* * * *

**Live Birds fed to Eagles
flown to Britain:**

Live parakeets were fed to birds of prey on a Pan American flight from New Delhi to London Heathrow. When the cargo jet landed on Wednesday evening, horrified R.S.P.C.A. officials found the dismembered bodies of the parakeets in blood-soaked cages.

Only one survived the ordeal and is at present being cared for at the R.S.P.C.A. airport hostel.

The R.S.P.C.A. believe that they were deliberately put there as food during the 12-hour journey. As well as the dead parakeets, two eagles, one buzzards and a tawny owl also died during the journey.

The R.S.P.C.A. said last night that this was because they had been caged in contradiction to international regulations. Instead of being boxed individually they were crated six to a box, consisting of a canvas frame with a small-gauge wire mesh covering it.

According to a report in the "Daily Telegraph", a hunt is on in India for the exporter of parakeets sent abroad by a firm from the "Holy City" on the Ganges. Mr. Babbar, the Airlines Cargo Manager, is doing his utmost to bring the culprit to book. Our S.P.C.A. has also written to the Animal Welfare Board in India and to the R.S.P.C.A. in this regard and we trust that they will stop this nefarious trade immediately.

* * * *

Annual General Meeting:

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday 15th March 1975 at 5.00 p.m. at the residence of Dr. Salim Ali at 46, Pali Hill, Bandra, Bombay 400 050.

Members who wish to travel by bus will find the BEST connecting service 211 and 214 from opposite Bandra Railway Station to Ambedkar Road. From there it is a short walk up Pali Hill to Dr. Salim Ali's residence. (The gate to the compound has the name of Mr. Hassan Ali). The house is next to that of film actor Dilip Kumar.

- Ed.

* * * *

CORRESPONDENCE:

Forest Wagtail.

I have seen a Forest Wagtail on the morning of 15.10.1974. The bird was feeding among the mango trees in the neighbourhood of my office till evening that day. This is an earlier record than the one given by J.S. Serrao as 22.10.1972 in the Newsletter for November 1972.

Is this the earliest record on the bird's southward passage?

R. Prabhakar Menon.

S.V. Nilakanta
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
C.D. Barfiwala Marg,
Andheri (West), BOMBAY 400 058.

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March 1975

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WILL THE FAUNA OF KHANDALA REGION SURVIVE
THE PERSISTENT AND STEADY CHANGE OF ITS ECOLOGY?

Rev. A. Navarro, S.J.

On May 3, 1974, I spent part of my holidays in Khandala. On my arrival some of my friends greeted me with a tricky question: "Why is it that there are less birds in Khandala this year? Since the question was put forth by a keen observer of nature, I gave serious thought to it. I moved about checking different parts of the forest of Khandala to see if I could observe the usual birds seen at these points in previous years. The fact is that the bird population of Khandala has diminished in the last eight or ten years and this is a sad reality.

In order to verify this observation, I requested the company and mutual co-operation of a friend who has been for a long time my inseparable companion on all my ramblings up and down the ravines of the Khandala Region.

The problem of the bird population is itself a complex one. Perhaps it will be very useful to analyse the complexity of this problem by examining the Khandala Region which is going through a speedy change in its ecology. The Khandala Ghats are the centre of this region and are being encroached upon by all sorts of human activity from all sides, but mainly from Khopoli

and Lonavala. The steady overflow of congested traffic through the ghats, the appearance of new industries and factories, the building of more and more residential houses and the everyday activities of the local population pollutes and violates the solitude and peaceful environment of this region. We must surmise that all these facts must have a very bad influence on the very survival of the birds.

I have learnt by experience that there are very few corners in the Khandala ravines which are free from the rattling noises of heavy vehicles and electric horns and at night the disturbances are from the flashing of powerful lights of the vehicles that move up and down the ghats. Besides, we have to bear in mind that the birds are still suffering from the ill-effects of last year's drought. In my article "The Year of the Drought" published in this paper on 12-73, I had mentioned "I still wonder that under these circumstances how many birds failed in their final goal of rearing offspring." The mere fact that some have noticed a slight decline in the bird population may be a confirmation of what I had foretold might happen.

This year the forest vegetation was exuberant, a true reville of luxurious foliage with all combination of green and yellow shades and patterns. But in spite of this, the insect life was very poor; besides the trees and bushes bearing wild fruits and berries have rendered a poor crop. Therefore it is evident that for the time being many birds will have to put up with an unbalanced diet, or search for food from some nearby forest. The final conclusion of our observation were that there were less noise than there usually should have been at this time of the year. We tried to spend more time on the spots where the birds were in previous years, but it only verified the conclusion that the bird population was less than usual. With reference to the Shamas and Parakeets my companion remarked that year after year we see less and less of them. We visited a spot nicknamed by us "The valley of the Shamas" where we never failed to see or hear the melodious songs of the Shamas. It is lamentable how the forest of the Khandala region is disappearing. It would be worthwhile to find a method by which the maximum benefits with the minimum of damage could be attained when cutting down or clearing forest areas. In this way the size of the forest will remain fairly constant instead of diminishing forever. I have always been rather suspicious of seeing axes and saws entering the forest areas. I think they do greater damage than the guns.

Perhaps those responsible for the indiscriminate but systematic destruction of forests have not fully understood the principles of conservation. There is what is known as "protective association". In simple term it means that the forests are needed for the protection of the fauna of that region. By destroying this protective association the birds and other animals have lost their natural protection and shelter and their food. They are also left to the mercy of predators and all other kinds of eventualities. In short, we are unbalancing the Ecology. Balance may take a long time. But since Nature works slowly, the region may be deprived of its proper adjustment in nature, the weather may be disturbed. This, in turn, would cause all kinds of unforeseen problems in that region. There may also be a danger of insects, plagues or it may trigger off an erosion process, losing all chances of a new reforestation.

(SPAN - September 1974)

WORLD FOOD PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS - by Lawrence A. Mayer:

"Of all the imponderables that affect the future demand for food, supply is the most difficult to gauge, for it is affected not only by economic considerations, but by changes in climate and in ecological conditions."

"Secretary Butz agrees, adding that the possibility of growing several crops a year makes the tropics "one of the great untapped agricultural areas of the world." It should be added, however, that some scientists believe the ecological balance of tropical regions to be quite delicate, and warn that development there must be undertaken cautiously."

* * * *

No doubt the ecology of the Khandala region is being steadily destroyed by the depredation of man. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident but a world wide phenomenon.

As the population of man increases there is less and less space for all other creatures. Man being very high up in the food chain to sustain him demands a much greater contribution from Nature.

Moreover, the affluence of man is quite unfortunately linked to the proportion of raw materials that he uses. It is still more saddening that many of these raw materials are irreplaceable. In fact the more the consumption of steel, petroleum, foodgrain, milk, paper etc. per capita population, the greater the society and the nation which makes such exploitation possible.

4

The solutions to this problem seem to be first of all to exercise immediate restraint on the wasteful consumption of Nature's bounty and secondly to control the alarming rapid increase of world population.

A simple mathematical exercise of comparing the diminishing resources of the world against the increase in population will not only convince any intelligent individual of the grave danger but even frighten him. It is quite possible that we have already reached the point of no return.

- Ed.

* * * *

BEHAVIOUR-PATTERN MIMICRY BY A GOLDFRONTED CHLOROPSIS, AND SOME THOUGHTS ON IT.

J.S. Serreo.

The Goldfronted Chloropsis (Chloropsis aurifrons) is noted to v vocally mimic to perfection the Tailor-Bird, Redwhiskered Bulbul, Iora, Whitebreasted Kingfisher, Rufousbacked Shrike, and the defiant shikra-like notes of the Black Drongo, but for the first time on 29th January, I observed the bird mimic the defiant calls accompanied by frenzied behaviour-pattern an excited Grey Drongo (Dicrurus leucophaeus) exhibits.

It all happened when my companion, a beginner of a birdwatcher, drew my attention to the calls in the Borivli National Park, Bombay, and asked for the identity of the caller. Relying on hearing alone, I declared it to be a Grey Drongo. I realized later that I was fooled when my companion drew my attention to the caller's colour and I took a look at it.

Perched in an exposed position on a topmost, leafless branch of a mango tree, the chloropsis was aggressively displaying to an assembly of Redwhiskered bulbuls feeding among the flowers of the Flame of the Forest (Butea monosperma) close to the mango tree. The chloropsis was uttering the defiant cheke of the Grey Drongo, flicking tail while so doing, and hopping from twig to twig as does the Grey Drongo. It kept this up until it spotted us below, when it dropped down to the thickly foliated part of the perch-tree and continued the swearing. The other instance of vocal-cum-behaviour mimicry, I recall, is the one recorded from Pariyar, Kerala -- a Racket-tailed Drongo (Dicrurus paradiseus) modelling a Jungle Babbler (Turdoides striatus) / J.C. Daniel, J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. 63:443/.

Dr. Salim Ali records an instance from the Surat Dangs of a Racket-tailed Drongo vocally mimicking a Shikra (Accipiter badius). Soon after the rackettailed concluded mimicking it was pounced upon, chased, caught and devoured by a Shikra (ibid.800). How then is mimicry advantageous to the mimicking bird? Of relevance to the query is the article entitled 'Vocal mimicry and bird song evolution', by F. Norman in the New Scientist, 21 June 1973 issue, at pp. 742-3. The author states that the basic mechanism of vocal mimicry is displacement activity. A mimicking bird places itself in a situation of being predated upon or being attacked by males of its own species. In these circumstances of conflicting response mimicry emerges as a displacement activity. Where mimicry is not biologically disadvantageous it may remain temporarily in the repertoire of the mimicking bird. So long mimicry does not create confusion during the breeding season, the mimicked calls can be readily employed and their significance can be enhanced when they are linked with an event. The ability to associate defiant calls with defiant behaviour adds to the information content of vocalised mimicry.

Seemingly, mimicry evolved to augment territorial display according to the author. The first step is simple imitation by juveniles learning song; its occurrence in adulthood is the result of displacement activity. Retention of mimicry in adult song depends on two factors: (1) the mimic must use the calls at a season when they have no biological significance; (2) the mimicked calls must be physically similar enough to those of the bird mimicking them, so as to convey the same information to territorial rivals. Where these two conditions do not occur, mimicry, if at all it occurs, will not become a permanent feature of the full song and will be confined to sub-song or displacement activity.

* * * *

PROCEEDINGS OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING:

The Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Field Club was held at the residence of Dr. Salim Ali at Pali Hill on the evening of Saturday 15th March 1975.

Dr. Salim Ali was kind enough to take the Chair and preside over the meeting.

The Hon. Secretary gave a brief account of the problems faced by the Club during the past year. At the outset the Hon. Secretary wanted to record an appreciation of the very great assistance given to the Newsletter by Mr. K.S. Lavkumar.

The account book was placed before the members for perusal and showed approximately the same balance when compared to corresponding months of previous years.

The membership remained practically constant, the new members being equal to those who had dropped out.

The out-door activities of the club in the Bombay region was restricted by the staggering of weekly holidays being a result of the power cut. However, Mr. J.C. Danniel' assured the members that the BNHS will continue to arrange outings on fixed days from fixed points. These will be announced in future issues of the Newsletter and will give members sufficient advance notice to participate in these group observations.

The editor complained about the enormous increase in the price of paper. It was also felt by Dr. Salim Ali and many members that the standard of articles in the Newsletter should be kept up and not allowed to fall.

It was, therefore, decided to skip one or two issues to save paper, especially when there were a paucity of a suitable mix of articles.

It was however made clear that the Newsletter is not a scientific journal and its informal nature will be sustained.

Regarding subscriptions the Hon. Secretary was of the opinion that members find it difficult, during working hours, to queue up in a post office for despatching a money order or postal order. Therefore, Dr. Salim Ali suggested that if a subscription was not received by the middle of the year, the member concerned should be sent an issue of the Newsletter by V.P.P. This would save the member from considerable effort and waste of time. This suggestion was accepted.

A new Bank Account has been opened in the name of the Honorary Secretary - Bird Watchers Field Club of India and Editor - Newsletter for Birdwatchers. Cheques addressed to these Office Bearers as well as in the personal names of the office bearers are acceptable.

The existing Office Bearers were elected to continue for the year 1975 and until the next Annual General Meeting.

At one stage the proceedings of the meeting were slightly interrupted by the all too brief an intrusion by a Paradise Flycatcher.

GULLS AT KRISHNARAJASAGAR

S.G. Neginhal.

On the March 7th 1975 I sighted some Gulls at the Krishnarajasagar reservoir, near Mysore. I give below details of these birds.

The birds were gregarious and lovely. From a long distance the general body colour was snow-white. But through a binocular some of the birds had their heads, necks, tails and underparts snow-white; and some had greyish blue heads. The mantle appeared to be pale greyish-blue. Out of 99 birds counted two had blackish caps. All the birds had reddish legs and bill excepting two that had yellowish legs and bills. One had a blackish bill. The feet were webbed. The tails were short and square and white in colour. The wings were white at the base and black at the tips with white "mirrors", seen while descending or taking off. The wings were long and exceeded the tail when closed, and their tips crossed over each other. Many had a vertical black crescent mark on their side necks just behind their eyes. It was evening time and the birds were settling for roosting on the partly submerged rocks of the dried up bed of the Krishnarajasagar. The birds also settled easily on the water, floating with more than half their bodies above water.

From the observation detailed above the possibility of the birds being terns is ruled out and that these are gulls is established. Terns differ from gulls, among other details, in being lightly built, with longer and narrower wings. Terns rarely settle on water (except Anous) and have short legs. They have slender bills. Gulls have stout bills with upper mandible longer than the lower.

Which are these Gulls? There are five possibilities - the Yellowlegged and Pinklegged Herring Gulls, the Lesser Black-backed Gull, the Brownheaded Gull and the Blackheaded Gull.

The Yellowlegged Herring Gull, Larus argentatus heuglini, and the Lesser Blackbacked Gull, Larus fuscus fuscus, have yellowish legs and, therefore, are to be ruled out, as almost all the above seen birds have reddish legs (although two had yellowish legs; and argentatus and fuscus are often found together). The Blackheaded Gull, Larus ridibundus ridibundus has no white "mirrors" near tip of primaries. As all the birds seen exhibited white "mirrors" in flight the ridibundus has to be deleted.

This reduction brings us to consider two possibilities viz., the Pinklegged Herring Gull, Larus argentatus mongolicus and the Brownheaded Gull, Larus brunnicephalus. The Mongolicus is not quite separable from the heuglini excepting that the mantle is slightly paler grey and the legs and feet are usually pinkish. This gull has its entire head, neck, tail and underparts snow-white (Salim Ali and D. Ripley). All the above birds seen had reddish legs, excepting two, and the group contained both snow-white headed and light grey headed gulls. Out of 99 birds counted two had dark brown caps almost appearing blackish. Since many of the birds had light grey caps, it may suggest that the birds are getting into their summer dress of the brunnicephalus, which has also the red legs and bill. Moreover many of these birds had black crescent markings just behind their eyes.

Only further keen observation in the coming days will establish the identification. I am sure the bird watchers will take advantage of the presence of the birds at the Krishnarajasagar in studying them before they emigrate.

* * * *

From the above detailed description it appears that the birds were mainly Brownheaded Gulls (Larus brunnicephalus). At this time of the year the adult birds develop the brown cap - the colour is Nescafe without milk.

It is not known whether any birds were observed with a bar on the tail.

Young birds go through various phases of colour change but continued further observations may not be possible if the birds go away to their breeding ground.

- Ed.

* * * *

CORRESPONDENCE:

Arrival & Departure of Swallows at Worli.

For the last three years I have been observing the arrival and departure of Swallows at our factory situated off Dr. Moses Road, Worli. They are with us from October to April. In the morning between 8 and 8-30 a.m. I would see about 50 of them perched on an electric wire. Similarly in the evening when the sun starts going down, between 4 and 4-30 they would be back on the wire. Their droppings have made a white line under the wire. During the day they are busy catching insects on the flight, making graceful dives and turns.

This year, surprisingly, I am only seeing a pair of these birds. This means that the other birds have given up this place, and have not returned to their usual hunting ground. I am unable to find any particular reason. Is it because the oil furnace has been shifted from one place to another nearer to the wire on which they perched! The chimney of this furnace is not high enough and emits lot of smoke at a lower level.

But the pair of White Wagtails is back again this year and entertains me morning and afternoon on our office terrace. I cannot say if it's the same pair. Once I threw bits of bread to see if they would accept. At first they seemed to be liking them, but subsequently rejected the bread.

During last week, for the first time I saw a party of Rosy Pastors on the Peepal trees near our office. They were moving from tree to tree and were with us for about 4/5 days. I don't see them now.

Incidentally, for the first time I saw swallows at our camp site at Jogeshwari. There has been a lot of digging around our camp site with the result that the Versova Creek water has made inroads at many places and it looks as if these birds are finding a lot of insects from the stagnant water.

But the most surprising thing this year is the absence of seagulls at Haji Ali. I am sure many of our other readers have also observed this. Otherwise, at this time every year we used to see thousands of seagulls in the shallows near the wall just behind the bus stop. Can any reader explain the reason for this sudden absence?

B.A. Palkhiwalla.

* * * *

Pollution of air and water can not only repel birds but also chase away the insects on which the birds prey.

- Ed.

* * * *

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BIRDING IN PUDUKOTTAI

Miss Shama Futehally.

In early February my brother-in-law, Romulus Whitaker, and my sister spent two weeks in Pudukottai District, Tamilnadu, making a survey of the area's reptiles for the Indian Gazetteer. On the established Indian principle that relatives are necessary everywhere, I went along. The others of the party were three Irula tribals, charming and easy people who are 'professional' snake-catchers. We were put up by Mr. and Mrs. Nadudurrai of the ruling family, who treated us with incredible kindness and hospitality. And they even laid on Nightjar calls at night and Brain-fever Bird calls during the day, just outside our room.

The area surrounding Pudukottai town is mainly scrub jungle with a great deal of acacia and Prosopis juliflora. Needless to say, a large Reserve Forest area has recently been planted over with eucalyptus by the Forest Deptt.

Every day the six of us would jeep out to a new area, where the others would start digging for snakes in likely places - the Irulas displaying an intuition about the snakes' hideouts which to me seemed magical. I admired them, however, from some distance. My own occupation was to wander about with the binoculars, playing a solitary game of guess-the-bird. On the

first day we drove out in the evening, and along the road we totted up the usual Rollers, White-breasted Kingfishers, Hoopoes, Common Green Bee-eaters, Black Drongoes, Rose-ringed Parakeets, and a Shikra.

In the field, there were two or three White-browed Bulbuls which allowed me to get fairly close and watch. One small shrike gave me a hearty chase through acacia thorns before emerging as a Grey Shrike. As the light was fading a Grey Partridge called occasionally and a Pale Harrier glided into view a couple of times in the distance.

The next day we went to Sittanavassal, which is a group of Jain rock temples cut dramatically in a vast lion-coloured buttress of rock, overlooking rice-fields. The cliff harboured many Dusky Crag Martins, and Scavenger Vultures were constantly wheeling round. But the highlight of the cliff was a pair of Brown Fish Owls which sat at opposite ends of the cliff and occasionally launched towards each other in swift flight, which from the distance was identified by Romulus as belonging to the Short-toed Eagle. As we wandered a little away from the cliff we saw Red-vented Bulbuls, Purple Sunbirds, and Ring Doves; then we reached a large bundh on the other side of which was a small jheel, inhabited by a Common Sandpiper and a Redshank. Our return to the cliff brought a shock; we heard a sudden rifle shot up the slope which winged one of the Fish Owls and brought it hurling to the ground. It was immediately collected by a group of youths who emerged from the nearby village. After attempting to quarrel with them we discovered that there was very little to be done, since if we took the owl home to nurse, its mate would probably replace it in the cooking-pot. We left the scene resolved on another strong letter to the Times of India.

On the way home a Laggar Falcon flew close by the jeep a couple of times. Every small pond or jheel had its attendant Pied Kingfishers sitting on overlooking wires, or making their crash landings on the water. As often as not there was a Common Kingfisher on the side. As the jeep approached a White Wagtail would frequently take off from the side of the road. Close scrutiny of the fields sometimes revealed a group of Ashy-crowned Finch-larks, and once or twice at least, a Rufous-tailed Finch-lark. Small brown movements on the side of the road materialised as Indian Pipits. And groups of White-headed Babblers seemed to congregate under every Banyan tree along the road.

On another of these expeditions we saw a Kestrel on a telegraph wire, and scattered a group of Little Ring Plovers as we bumped through a wet field. I was beginning to be vastly disturbed by a small bird of prey which floated miles up in the sky wherever we were displaying only its underside, but after much distress

I saw it alight on a tall tree and reveal itself as a Black-winged Kite. A Pied Bush Chat (Southern?) a pair of Spotted Owlets in a small copse of trees, and a group of Yellow-wattled Lapwings standing so still it was hard to believe, made up the day. On the way home Brahminy mynahs strutted along the edges of the fields, and we saw one or two large groups of Brahminy kites wheeling and diving over jhools. Just near Pudukottai town were two surprises, a Red-winged Bush-lark on a wire and a Wood Shrike just below it on a bush.

Another day was spent in the huge grounds of the old Palace, which is now the municipal building of Pudukottai. It is planted with mango, tamarind, and other large trees. Here we saw a couple of Golden-backed Woodpeckers following each other up a tree-trunk, a lone Coppersmith high up somewhere, and heard the clinky call of a Treepie. It was nice to be interrupted by one of the Irula boys with a fresh piece of honeycomb dripping with honey, and to be told to chew the honeycomb and suck in the honey. Thus fortified I hunted out a pair of Jerdon's Chloropses, a female Paradise Flycatcher, and, surprisingly for the first time in our stay, a Magpie Robin. I also had a glimpse of the rear end of an Oriole. Then there was an even more exciting interruption. One of the Irulas was following the chatter of Jungle Babblers as an indication that a snake was in the vicinity, and he broke upon a cobra eating a monitor lizard. The dead monitor was still whole, and half-way down, and we all watched and photographed the scene from yards away.

After that, snakes were on my mind for the day. At one point I peered closely at a dappled patch of light and shade under a bush, and distinguished myself by screaming that it was a Russell's Viper. Then I sat down bitterly on a stone, and saw only a Grey Wagtail.

On the way back to Madras we moved up along the coast, and as the area began to get marshier and more full of water, it provided Dabchicks, a group of Blackwinged Stilts, one or two Greenshanks, and a Chestnut Bittern nearly hidden under a clump of reeds. When we stopped and walked along the sea in the sun, we were regarded by a Whitebellied Sea Eagle sailing gently over our heads towards the sea, and diving for fish.

The long drive in the jeep was marked by what might be called a 'cute' incident. At one point we stopped near the side of the road to collect some weaver-bird nests which were lying on the ground. These were tucked away at the back of the jeep as future drawing-room decorations, but before we had gone very far the nests began to wiggle about and three baby munias, not weaver-birds, fluttered out of them. They were gone before

we could collect ourselves, but my recollection is that they were grey with darker grey heads.

Another thing which was pointed out to me in the course of the drive was the great variation in the blue of the White-breasted Kingfishers. It seemed to vary from a deep metallic blue to a light blue which was almost green. I would be grateful for support in this observation.

Near Chidambaram, we stopped at a river bank in the cause of crocodiles, and this yielded, at a great distance, a pair of Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, unmistakeable although they were in non-breeding plumage. Loud did-you-do-its reminded us that we had not heard them in Pudukottai at all. And a very good finale for the trip was to discover a Pied Crested Cuckoo near the Chidambaram Reservoir, although the price of watching the bird was the consciousness that a crocodile might join me any minute.

* * * * *

BEHAVIOUR IN NESTING SEASON

Ananta Mitra.

It was the end of spring. In the morning on 21.4.74 at about 10.00 a.m. I went to our favourite haunt for birds, the Rath-tola Garden. It is about 20 Kms south of Calcutta. Bird-Calls were coming from all directions. The calls which attracted me most were the sharp "Cha-Chwe, Cha-Chwe" calls of the Paradise Flycatcher (TERPSIPHON PARADISI). Movement of these birds in this locality, is not clearly known. It has been observed that in the month of April and May they come in this area for raising their young and depart after some months.

Within a few minutes I discovered a pair of these fascinating birds flitting gayfully in the foliage. Following their movements I found their nest. In the fork of a small 'Golap Jam' tree (EUGENIA JAMBOS) at a height of about 10 feet a cup-shaped nest had been built. It contained eggs and both the male and female were hatching the eggs by turns.

Proceeding ahead I was confronted with sharp agitated calls of Bronzed Drongos (DICURUS AENEUS). A pair of them was pouring in their vehement protest at my approach. The cause of their angry demonstration was soon revealed. A new-born Chic was there. An almost indistinct 'Cha Cha' sound gave out its presence. But for the tiny beak and eyes it was a round fluffy thing, resting on the small branch of a mango tree (MANGIFERA INDICA).

As I trained my attention on the chick the parents screamed in protest. When screams did not have the desired effect, they started mimicking the scolding notes of the Tree Pie (DENDROCITTA VAGABUNDA). Failing even at this, the shrieking birds began to whirl menacingly over my head. Their boldness went so far that it seemed that they were trying to swoop on me with their sharp beaks. I got really afraid and had to beat a quick retreat.

Moving further into the garden I once again faced a similar situation. This time with a pair of Black-naped blue flycatcher (MONARCHA AZUREA). A chick of them had just come out of the shell and the parents were mounting guard on him. A little bluish ball with dazzling tiny eyes was looking around the world. The parents became deeply concerned about the safety of their charge and began to shriek their loudest.

But unlike the Drongos there was no frontal attack. Temperamentally they are much less fierce than the Drongos.

In the garden there were a few big and small patches of water which were used by some species of Kingfisher. Among them I identified a Storkbilled Kingfisher (PELAGOPSIS CAPENSIS). In the nesting season he had become vociferous with loud calls of "Kwah - Kwah-Kwah-Kwah".

Among various other birds a good number of Black-headed Orioles (ORIOLES XANTHORUS) were found. They were giving out pleasant seasonal calls, sounding like, "Ekti-khoka-Hoke, Ekti-khoka-Hoke, Ekti-Khoka-Hoke". In Bengali the words mean "let a son be born".

At intervals batches of 2 or 3 Orioles were pursuing one another and seemed to be selecting their mates.

* * * *

BIRD SANCTUARY AT KILLESHWAR IN BARDA HILL (Jamnagar Dist., Saurashtra).

Sursinji S. Jadeja.

The ancient Killeswar Temple situated in Barda Hills is 60 miles south of Jamnagar.

Famous Shumli ruins lie adjoining the north slope of Abhapura peak (ancient RAIVATAKA) and Killeswar is on the southern slope of Abhapura.

Last December I had an opportunity to visit Killeswar to see the renovation work of the ancient temple which is being carried out by Shri Jam Dharmada Trust since last three years.

Close by the temple runs a small stream which is known as Kilganga and surrounding the temple grow very old trees of Mango, Jambu, Amla and Peepal etc., which are ideal for a Bird Sanctuary.

Despite three lean years in Saurashtra, and despite the fact that Killeswar is more than one thousand feet above sea level, the rivulet is live with fresh water. The beautiful Parvati kund has 30 feet of water which is overflowing.

During my 15 days' stay at Killeswar I was very much attracted by many species of birds which are rarely seen elsewhere in Saurashtra.

Special privileges enjoyed by
Killeswar Birds

The total area under the temple does not exceed more than 40 acres, yet this small area is visited by more than 50 species of birds, because they are specially protected here by strict orders of Jamsaheb Shri Sataji - the sole Trustee. Privileges enjoyed by birds are as under :-

- 1) Nobody is allowed to shoot birds in this unique sanctuary.
- 2) No one is allowed to pluck fruits from any fruit tree however remunerative they may be.
- 3) A special type of bird feeding platform is constructed 20' x 10' on top and 10' high, surrounded by a water channel, so that not even rats could get on it.

Such privileges are not to be enjoyed by birds in any part of India.

Among the species found here, Babblers are the most audacious birds. They are not at all afraid of human beings.

A visit to Killeswar is a MUST to Bird Lovers.

ATTRACTING BIRDS

R.K. Bhatnagar.

Note on 'Attracting birds' by Mr. Abraham Verghese (in Newsletter for Bird Watchers, Vol. XIV (3):5-6, March, 1974) appears of interest to us from Economic Ornithology point of view, besides of course its multifarious significance to bio., eco. and behavioural aspects. Since from the perusal of literature we find that very scarce information is available on this aspect and shall be of interest to field bird watchers, the aspect is being reported.

Attractants are of various types: food, viz. most of the birds are attracted to region where food is available as in case of Parakeets on Sun flower and Vultures on carcass; habitat: various birds are attracted to suitable habitat which is due to various factors - protection, nesting, food etc.; sex: physiological, mating pair etc. These aspects amongst birds particularly on Indian species are least worked out. However, similar studies on insect species are good and considerable work is being done in India too. Further discussions on these are beyond our scope here.

Here it may be pointed out that in arriving at or in finding out an attractant one should bear in mind the factor of availability (of food) too. In fact in such findings a series of trials are performed to find out preferences and further trials out of preferred ones, sometimes yields an attractant. In fact this is how with prebaiting (untreated) effective bait is evolved. Obviously this varies from species to species and sometimes from season to season, depending upon the preference at that time.

Perusal of literature on 'food preference in nature' amongst birds we find that there is a paucity of information and the only information available is from studies by Dr. Salim Ali in his various books. Still, much remains to be done. Thus this aspect is not only important for watching birds from close angles but also on factors like 'food preference', Visitant species, segregation of plant varieties (crops particularly) not preferred, either due to plant physiological bearings (viz. grains at milky stage) or due to morphological structures of the plant viz. shed layers of anthers on earheads of bajra, though it is preferred food of many birds and presence of long awns on wheat earheads. Such studies, thus, can perhaps be used as methods affording 'selectivity' i.e. to trap the required species and release the others.

From the descriptions of Mr. Abraham it appears that he perhaps refers to the large sized Sunflower which is cultivated in many parts of India for its oil bearing seeds. In many parts of Northern India, the crop is damaged mostly by Parakeets approximately to the tune of 10-25%. In a study at New Delhi, we found that birds do not always feed in concentric circles of seeds, instead start feeding from any side they perch. Sometimes they even feed on soft parts of flower and often not a single seed is left on a flower. This can be visualised when in a flower of about 8 inches diameter no seed is left.

In fact all field observations are immensely important particularly on 'feeding habits' in nature as the factor is of significance and is scantily worked out. Perhaps this is the reason of poorly developed 'culturing techniques' in our country. Also such studies may yield many more such valuable information as has been shown by Dr. Salim Ali in his studies on 'Seed dispersal' and 'Ornithophily'.

* * * *

EDITORIAL:

The following news item is being reproduced for bird watchers. In case our readers had missed it earlier it can be read now.

"Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma, Union Minister for Communications, released four multi-coloured postage stamps, depicting Indian birds, in Bombay on Monday.

Dr. Sharma hoped that these stamps would help people to remember about birds and their importance in this country.

The first stamps in the series were handed over by Dr. Sharma to the noted ornithologist, Mr. Salim Ali, and to the artist, Mr. J.P. Irani.

The four stamps are in the denominations of 25 p., 50 p., one rupee and two rupees.

The birds were chosen by Mr. Salim Ali, painted by Mr. J.P. Irani and printed by the photogravure process at the India Security Press at Nasik."

A postage stamp seems to be a very good way of making the public aware of the desired object. This publicity factor is further enhanced when the stamps are released under television and radio coverage.

The unobtrusive and beautiful Indian Pitta is shown on the 25 paise stamp which we all use more than the other denominations. Most city dwellers may not be aware of the existence of such a bird although it is not rare in cities with gardens and hedges. We should see a lot more of the Pitta if cats and crows can be kept in check.

* * * * *

CORRESPONDENCE

More about the Nesting of the
Red-Wattled Lapwing.

Recent letters about "Unusual nesting by Red-wattled Lapwings" prompt me to remind my fellow Watchers of the several pairs of Vanellus indicus that serenely nest amid the rose bushes in the Mogul Gardens of Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi.

There is also the unique case of the Kotah (Rajasthan) Lapwing that nests -- or did nest until at least 1956 -- just in front of the Palace. An extensive "parade-ground" had at some time been stripped of its original grass and turf, and tarred over -- all but a small triangle of grass, with sides each about 20 feet in length, which included an obviously traditional nesting site of a pair of Vanellus. Realising the riskiness of a site now so greatly exposed and open to all kinds of dangers, the benevolent Maharao had appointed an armed sentry to stand at one corner of the triangle and thus ensure the safety of the incubating Lapwing.

Does anybody know whether this delightful situation still continues? I have had no opportunity to see the place again since 1956. Surely this must be the only genuinely wild bird which has had the honour of a Royal Guard!

- Thomas Gay.

* * * * *

Does "Crow Eat Crow"?

My care for the safety of small nesting birds around my flat has from time to time led me to aim my .22 air rifle at Crows or -- especially -- Crow Pheasants. Whenever my air has been true, the result has been a burst of excitement and indignation among the whole local population of Crows, both splendens and macrorhynchos. Their reaction has been just the same, when the victim has been a Coucal, as when it has been one of themselves. This seems to show that Corvus regards Centropus as a member of its own infamous brotherhood.

Now, in the days when the price of cartridges permitted one to shoot snipe and quail, and even to practise on crows, I used to observe the same corvine excitement and indignation, but never saw a dead crow actually touched by any of its fellows. From this I concluded that the "Dog doesn't eat dog" principle applies to crows (although in these tough days it is no longer invariably true of dogs).

I was therefore not a little surprised, in the last week of February, to observe a Jungle Crow pecking strongly at the corpse of a Crow Pheasant which I had shot five days previously. Other crows made vocal comments on the performance, but not one would join the pecker at his work; after a while even he seemed to find the strip of feathers scarcely worth investigating, and flew away.

Have any of my fellow Watchers come across such examples of "Crow does eat Crow"?

- Thomas Gay.

* * * * *

The cunning nature in a crow seems to be inbuilt and not necessarily acquired through the exercise of any special intelligence or through experience. I will cite an example in support of this opinion.

Last month I was sitting in the verandah of my hotel in Trivandrum. In front of me was a group of large trees which had the nest of a Pariah Kite. Several crows were also nesting in the same trees which also served as a noisy roost for a hundred or more birds at night.

As I sipped my afternoon tea I idly watched a kite bringing something to feed its young. A group of crows immediately harassed the kite which after screaming with frustrated rage dropped the tit bit.

Even as the morsel of food fell to the grassy ground a young crow dropped down besides the food and held its mough open. Within the same half of a second a parent crow picked up the food and thrust it down the throat of the young crow.

Obviously the young crow was too young to feed itself but was not too young to participate in the well timed performance of depriving the kite family of its snack.

Although this performance smacked of well drilled and rehearsed efficiency this drilling and tutoring, if any, could not have taken place as only a few weeks must have elapsed since the fledgeling left its nest.

(Trivandrum is about 10° south of Bombay and the summer season seems to be therefore about 40 days in advance as witnessed by the crows nesting and the flowering of Cassia, Paltoforum and other trees).

- Ed.

* * * *

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BIRD WATCHING (OR SEARCHING) IN MIZORAM

Ishwar Prakash.

I visited Mizoram for about a week in connection with the outbreak of rodent population allegedly associated with Bamboo flowering. After arriving at Aizawl air-strip by a Dakota flight, I was greeted by a loud symphony being ardently played by cicads but shockingly there was no chirruping of sparrows or cawing of crows to break the monotony. We took about an hour to travel by circuitous road to Aizawl proper (around 4000') but not a single sighting of any bird was recorded.

Mizoram is a montanne terrain, steep valleys, tall hills; villages and towns are situated on slopes, nearly on the top of the mountains. Although the average annual rainfall in Mizoram varies from 2000-3000 mm yet except for the rainy season, a general paucity of water continues. Water is collected from dripping creeks. The most dominant vegetation is composed of bamboos of several species, Mau, Rua, Rawthing; Erianthus grass; and a few species of trees. The herbaceous cover during this time (third week of March) of the year appeared to be rather poorly represented. Mizos by and large believe in high-protein diet and are omni-non-vegetarian.

After settling in the Circuit House, I scanned the sky -- no kites, vultures, crows -- the vast sky overhanging the deep valley and over the lofty mountain was devoid of any kind of life, except plentiful swifts -- probably two species. Then I searched the canopies of the trees, no bulbuls, doves, and sparrows. There were no babblers in the hedges and no drongos, no bee-eaters on telephone wires. I did not take this absence of birds at Aizawl seriously but next day at 4 a.m. as the sun peeped from behind two cliffs, I tuned my ears for bird calls. During the 4 hours of bird 'listening', I heard the domestic fowl only. I was overjoyed to see a small flock of six house sparrows which, I was told by the owner of the Circuit House, was being protected by him from tiny tots playing with sling-shots or catapults.

I did not score any addition to my bird list until I visited Sarrang, a village at the foot of the hill, on the bank of Tlawng river, and about 30 kms of Aizawl. The valleys and hill slopes, through which we motored, are thick with bamboos, Sachharum (Erianthus now) and occasional trees. On our way down to the valley, a chat like bird did vanish into the clumps but I could not see it properly. On the river bank, we saw a lonely wagtail and delightfully heard the calls of jungle fowls which are told to be plentiful particularly in the southern Mizoram where they are reported to be a paddy pest. I was, eagerly expecting to see lapwing, egrets and other marsh-loving birds on the river bank but was utterly disappointed by their absence. On the last day of my stay at Aizawl, how glad I was to see a lonely kestrel hovering over the sky.

On my way back from Aizawl to Silchur (190 kms) by the precariously winding road, I maintained an intense vigil to watch birds which was not quite difficult as the jeep could barely cross a speed of 25 km/hr. During our descent to Kampui and Thingdwal, I did not see any bird nor heard the jungle fowl although swifts were plentiful throughout. Near Kolasib, about 2000' near a Banyan tree, I heard the sweet chuwik, chuwik, probably of a Tailor bird? A red-vented bulbul, then a pair, flew past. Two pairs of house crows were keeping their vigil from a tree over the restaurants. From Kolasib to -- Bilkhawthlir, the spotted dove started appearing repeatedly on the road. A few chats, Rock-chat, Copsychus, a black robin like bird, a hoopoe and a Drongo were seen. At Vairengte two pariah kites were hovering; a common myna, couple of crows were also observed. After a few km of Vairengti, I got out of the hills into the plains -- lot of birds, all one could expect, perching on the telephone wires, on marshy fields and so on.

I had discussed the apparent paucity of bird fauna at Aizawl and near about regions with the local inhabitants and I was told of only one reason about their apparent rarity. Mizos like to eat more protein - almost any kind. 2-3 decades ago partridges, wild fowl, hornbills, pheasants were quite common around Aizawl. But now we can't see them at all. I thought of other reasons of this apparent depletion of avifauna in Mizoram and to my mind they are :

(1) There may be a seasonal altitudinal migration of birds up and down the hills and during summer, when I visited Aizawl, there were not many birds. Although I had travelled thrice from the base of the hilly region to the top, birds were only a few in number at every altitude. Sustained observations over a year may tell us the real story.

(2) Most of Mizoram is covered with bamboos, some of which flower once in 50 years and others follow a 25-30 years flowering cycle. Fruit-bearing herbaceous cover is scanty. There is, therefore, not much food for birds.

(3) The jhum-paddy cropping pattern may also be indirectly responsible for scaring the birds out of the jungle. The forests are very frequently burnt for cleaning to accommodate the paddy fields. The same field is not sown next year and a 4 to 8 years shifting cycle is observed. Hence large scale jungle fires over vast areas are very common. In fact one can see 4 to 6 large scale fires on one slope of a valley. Fires not only scare the avifauna but also destroy their habitat. Secondly, the CO₂ and CO content in the air should be so high as to spurn any attempt on the part of the birds to survive there. I have noticed that on certain days the visibility in the valley is very poor due to clouds of smoke.

Lastly I caution the readers that my bird watching (or searching) lasted only for a short while, only during one season, and only at a handful of localities, so it is difficult to draw any definite conclusion.

* * * *

THE FIGHTING URGE

T.V. Jose

This refers to the note "Jungle Babblers at Pali Hill, Bandra Bombay 400 050 by Salim Ali in November 74 issue (Vol. XIV NII) of N.L.

I am giving here a hypothetical explanation on the basis of a few incidental observations. Yet I suppose this may prove

useful to the readers of NL in general to be more critical and careful in their future observations, and for a few others, who have environmental opportunity and the enquiring mind to serve as an incentive to study deeply the phenomenon through further observations and even experiments if possible, so that the truth will be available in more accurate form.

Humans witness avian mock-fights, not a very rare occurrence:

At the outset I must say the range of this strange behaviour (referred by Salim Ali in his note) extends to other species also. For, I have witnessed such skirmishes among common house crows (Corvus splendens) and as in the case of jungle babblers (Turdoides sommer villei) their amity was unquestionable when they were found resting side by side on the same branch of a tree after the vicious fight between them only a moment ago. This unmediated liaison could raise only doubt and confusion to the extent that I wanted more and more observations of this peculiar phenomenon before I would commit to write and send the note to the Editor of NL.

Mock-fight: its cause and effect:

During the early stages of evolution when gregariousness was not a part of their nature, individual birds fought against each other for food and sex and the selection was based mainly on the fighting ability of the individual birds. In group life like that of jungle babblers to fight for food (and sex ?) is not necessary, but I feel the instinct to fight persists nonetheless in rudimentary form. Like any other instinct this instinct too must be causing tension when it is not allowed to operate in an organism and this tension (the urge) is relieved periodically in their mock-fights.

If that be the case what makes individual birds leave their single life in preference to group life, as we have assumed here ? The answer is that various organisms adapt themselves to various safety methods to get protection from their enemies, and group life is just one among them. The very sight of a number of organisms together is likely to keep their enemy at bay. I would rather quote Tinbergen: "The black caterpillars which are not camouflaged, live in clusters. ...it has been shown that the closely related and very similar larvae of the small Tortoise shell and the Peacock do derive protection from living in clusters. Redstarts for instance do not as a rule attack these larvae while they are clustering, but as soon as one detaches itself from the group and wanders off the birds are far less reluctant to take them"

In the case of birds, group life means much more. The ability to be vigilant and to locate the danger is not uniform among the individual birds like any other ability. Some of them are more alert and vigilant by nature than others in the group and their service will be enjoyed by all. Group life will allow, again, many of the members to relax while a few are on the look-out. The pattern can change from time to time with the result all the members can relax in their turn and yet the group will remain watchful of the likely dangers in the best manner. In the event of an enemy's attack individual birds in a group may fly off in different directions. The visual and auditory stimuli that crowd upon the enemy's sensory organs might put the enemy in utter confusion. The element of unexpectedness and the inherent fear in the enemy itself could make the confusion worse. It is also possible the group may mob the enemy instead of fleeing. In the face of numerical strength, more threatening than the massive strength of a single individual, the enemy would show a clean pair of heels.

As regards co-operation among the individuals and their interdependence and amity, not all group-living species of birds can be alike. At one end the individuals in a species are strung together very loosely while at the other end gregariousness and sociability may have suppressed the individuals' fighting instinct almost entirely and it will be difficult to find an instance of fighting among them. Even our having not witnessed a fight among the individuals in a particular group of birds should not lead us prematurely to believe that they have achieved sociability fully, for I feel the life preserving instincts die hard in any species. Group life of birds deserve closer study before which any conclusion that we may arrive at should remain tentative in nature.

Another equally rare occurrence

I wish to recall here an experience I had years ago when I was a boy hunting birds with a catapult in my hands. A common sandpiper (*Tringa hypoleucos*) was struck by the pellet. Consequently one of its wings was incapacitated and the bird dropped down into a feeding canal of 5 or 6 ft. width in a rice field. Faced with myself on one bank and my friend on the other, the bird found no way to escape and we were sure to catch the floating bird alive. But the unexpected happened: the bird dived down into the water with no visible element of difficulty and surfaced some distance ahead. It had to repeat the feat many times before it found itself safely away from us. Now the question is : how many of us have observed a common sandpiper diving? I have not seen before or since. I am sure the bird was able to revive the power

to swim and dive when faced with a situation demanding it, though its ancestors sometime in the bird's genealogy must have used this power in a larger measure in their daily life. This incident proves that there are various trends, lying in an organism dormant and we may pass them on as not existing at all. The fighting instinct could be very well one among them.

It can be argued that the extent to which tension relieving fight (for brevity, t.r.f.) will be absent in that species. If therefore f.s.f. is found more commonly among house crows than among jungle babblers, the fighting (t.r.f.) as an exercise to relieve tension will be more frequently observable among the babblers than among the crows. Thus it is definitely impossible to witness t.r.f. in the rufous-backed shrike or the magpie robin, for example, since they never lead a group life and never need to suppress f.s.f. On the other hand, there having many species of birds leading group life and the chance of seeing these birds fight to relieve their tension being sufficiently large how shall we account for our lagging in observations of these fights (t.r.f.) and their fewer reportings? Probably the answer lies in the fact that we rarely pay serious attention to any fights of birds presuming that they fight either for food or sex.

Alert mechanism -- a kindred behaviour of t.r.f.:

If the fighting instinct of the individuals in a species is for the survival of the fittest, the alert mechanism has been evolved out of the need to save the group from external enemies.

The strange behaviour of house crows at night reported by Mr. Partha Pratim Majumdar (April, May, 74, issues) is to me not due to any error in sense of time, since it is well-known that birds and other animals have very accurate time sense and errors on this score is an unlikely possibility. On the contrary, I feel, it is because the alert mechanism is at work. The roosting habit of the crows and the feeding nature of the domestic fowl (Gallus gallus) must have made them most vulnerable to the attack of enemies in their long past life. The fear and the instinct to escape, built up by the enemies' attack and fortified by the individual vigilance during the period, continue to exist still, in a vestigial form. It is possible, we may presume, that some individual bird/s will be more prone to be provoked than any other ones in a group at a given time. Some stimuli, now unknown to us, trigger off the response in that individual bird (or birds). In the group, other birds that are also responsive to the same stimuli at varying degrees but not equally, will respond to the signal to escape (danger cry) and the fear spreads out to them readily and they in their turn as members of the group

make the same escape signal. And the interaction of fear among the members continues for some time, but in the absence of any fear-object, the fear is not sustained further, and they settle down to feed (in the case of domestic fowl) or to roost (in the case of house crows).

Operation of vestigial fighting instinct in corvian crows
and in Babbler sisterhood:

The vestigial fighting instinct of the members of a group may manifest itself more acutely in some of the individuals for hereditary reasons when some stimuli now unknown to us release the response to fight and the fight breaks out in the group. Other members that strain at the same leash but to a lesser extent enters the melee according to the intensity of their urge, some jeering and cheering, one or two plunging right into the thick of the fight which goes on till the tension is fully relieved. This type of emotional purge, as it were, affects all the members that participate at different levels in the fight. The interval between one such fight and the other should therefore be comparatively tension free and peaceful. The painful experience of their fight does not leave behind bitterness or enmity among the participants. We humans will have great difficulty to comprehend this kind of activity in a group life for reasons of our own.

An avian witnesses a human mock-fight:

Let us put the question to ourselves: Are we entirely free from this type of pugnacity? The answer to this question is our long list of internecine quarrels and blood-shed in our well-recorded history which can be traced ultimately to our mutual fear, suspicion and the desire to fight (which we may acknowledge or not) in spite of our far better reasoning power. Though we get our tension relieved partly or fully after each fight unpleasant enmity or pleasant excitement remains as a residue in our behaviour. For this we have to take into account our better memory, culture and our far more developed ego. We indeed get relief from the tension that mounts up in the absence of any fight in peace time, through various kinds of sports, physical and mental, which are nothing if not mock-fights in humans. Let us bring before our mental eyes a foot ball play ground, crowded with spectators, two batches actively playing to win over the other, the cheer and jeer of the gallery, incipient kicking movements of their legs and at last after the game both the batches shaking hands with no element of enmity in them, no matter who has won. A crow or a jungle babbler would be equally puzzled, if it were allowed to witness the human mock-fight, provided of-course it had the same interest, power of perception and the ability to interpret.

EDITORIAL NOTE:

There is much satisfaction in coming to know and recognize a large variety of birds by their appearance and voice. For a number of years a bird watcher's life is full of pleasant surprises in making new discoveries for himself.

However, unless the watcher is fortunate enough to keep changing his environments, a time will come when he knows all the birds in his locality and there is nothing new to amuse him.

When this situation is reached a bird watcher is likely to lose interest, unless he realizes that actually there is very little we know about even the most common birds.

Referring to Mr. Jose's enlightening article in this issue we come to understand that man and for that matter birds do not live by bread alone. A little fighting is necessary, especially if you are young and happen to be male. Apart from organized mock-fighting in the shape of foot ball or even an indoor game of chess who has not continued to wrestle on the class room or dormitory floor even as the kibitzers shouted "teacher is coming"?

For further knowledge of the fighting urge the reader may refer to the works of Lorenz and Tinbergen and above all make his own observations.

We know very little about so called well known birds. For instance, two days ago there was a cyclonic wind. In the late afternoon, my daughter reported that a sick black and white bird like a Magpie robin, on being alarmed by her approaching steps, had just managed to fly over a four foot wall and was lying in my neighbour's compound. I asked her to get the bird cage ready and ran around to our neighbour's backyard expecting to find a Pied Crested Cuckoo. The cuckoo was found and picked up by me before any of the cats which were stretched out in the sun woke up. The usual Crows which haunt the neighbourhood were busy riding up and down the storm wind a form of sport which they will not miss for anything.

The right wing of this Pied Crested Cuckoo (Clamator jacobinus) was hanging down a little and the bird was quite exhausted. After reviving the bird with water from a dropper it was placed in a cage and given glucose and water. This gave sufficient energy for it to perch properly instead of sitting on the floor.

No caterpillars, neither hairy nor smooth, which according to the books is the main diet of these birds could be found. Tender leaf tips were ignored by the bird.

Therefore, later in the evening the bird was force fed with some hard boiled egg. It was noticed that the inside of the mouth was pink in colour although the glossy black plumage with green reflections may indicate an adult bird.

Although the bird protests loudly and nips my fingers every time I pick it up for force feeding it the very fact that I have to feed it, that its mouth is pink and it does not even bother to catch winged termites which came in profusion last night are pointed to it being a young one.

The wing measures 150 mm indicating its African habitat (Clamator j. serratus) but its tail is only 150 mm. Only adult African birds are supposed to come to India for breeding during the monsoon. Young birds of this variety may be expected by the end of the monsoon. Then what is this doing here on the 31st of May?

One would expect the monsoon wind to help the birds in their flight from Africa to India which seems to be just conjecture in the absence of banding records. Is it possible for some birds to arrive without the help of the monsoon and find breeding babblers and lay their eggs in time to produce a young adult by 31st May? Sounds incredible. Is it possible for the local species, Clamator j. jacobinus to have a 150 mm wing?

The direction of wind on that day was from the South East at that time and the velocity was about 80 k.m.p.h. as reported by Colaba observatory which had warned the people of Bombay against the mini-cyclone. The bird could not have been blown in from the sea. The damage to the right wing which appears to be mending well shows no external injury by cat or crow which normally never let go after drawing first blood.

Various foods such as bread, eggs and fruit have been tried and the bird seems to thrive on bananas.

Considerable more observation and research will have to be done by bird watchers to understand the migration and feeding habits of the Pied Crested Cuckoo both the native and the African sub-species. The information available now is quite scanty. We just do not know to what extent this bird is a resident of India, is locally migratory and eats fruit in addition to caterpillars. Young birds which had been fed by their foster parents (insect eating babblers) may show stomach contents of caterpillars. Later on they may take to a more frugivorous diet like many other cuckoos.

Meanwhile this beautiful bird may afford me a chance to make a sketch in black and white for a new NL cover.

* * * * *

CORRESPONDENCE:

I wish that some of our Members would reply to queries raised by fellow watchers. With the exception of the Editor, hardly any of them ever do this. Surely it makes our Newsletter much more lively if Members' questions are answered or commented upon. If you agree with me, can you editorially suggest this?

Thomas Gay

* * * * *

Done.

- Ed.

* * * * *

How Yellow is a "Yellow"-Eyed Babbler?

On the evening of 18 May, at Panchgani (District Satara, Maharashtra State) I watched a small party of Babblers near a trickle of water among some bushes. They were obviously Yellow-eyed Babblers (Chrysomma sinense) but their eyes, which I studied through my binoculars at a range of twenty feet or so, were of a bright and shining crimson. Has any fellow Watcher observed the same colour? Is it explainable on the score of a distinct local race?

Thomas Gay.

* * *

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NEWSLETTER FOR
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THE PIED CRESTED CUCKOO

J.S. Serrao.

It is interesting to note from the Editorial in the Newsletter 15(5): 8-9 that Mr. S.V. Nilakanta came across the Pied Crested Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*) on 31st May 1975. I myself came across it on 1st June morning in the Borivli National Park. The bird's settled behaviour made me to think at the time that it had arrived in Bombay much earlier than I had met it that morning. In 1974 I stumbled on the bird on the morning of 16th June; 18 birds seemingly making for shelter inside of a mile along the Park road pointed out that they were just pouring into Bombay.

Mr. Nilakanta gives the wing of his bird as 150 mm and suggests it to be of African origin, *Clamator jacobinus serratus*. But wing measurements alone are very indistinct in determining the races of the Pied Crested Cuckoo. An accepted formula prescribes an average wing of 144 mm and over for the race *serratus*, and 144 mm and under for *jacobinus*. A look at this prescription shows that there should be individuals in both the races whose wings range from 132 to 156 mm. That such a variation in the wing measurement exists could be made out from the detailed wing lengths given by C.B. Ticehurst in *The Ibis* 1923: 38.

It is generally considered that Pied Crested Cuckoos breeding to the north of a line drawn from about 18° N latitude (i.e. just south of Bombay) to Darbhanga in north Bihar belong to the race serratus. But how very arbitrary this demarcation could be is illustrated by the male collected by Dr. Salim Ali at Bandipur on 17.xi.1939 during the Mysore Ornithological Survey - a bird which was excessively fat, and which Dr. Salim Ali considered it to be of the race serratus, preparing rather late for emigration. (J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. 44: 9-10).

It is possible that Indian breeding birds winter in tropical Africa migrating via Baluchistan and Arabia and spend the winter months mostly in the eastern part of Africa as far south as Transvaal. But a certain number also breeds in Africa, at least in Ethiopia from March to middle of June (Bannerman, The Birds of Tropical West Africa, Vol.3: 107; 1933), and southern part of Sudan. It is rather improbable that they breed twice, once in Africa laying a white, and then in India laying a blue egg as suggested by Whistler (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 33: 136-144). Possibly a certain number convert the normal winter quarters into their breeding area and never return to their original home, thus giving rise to a population of quite different habits as regards migration and maybe of morphological differentiation also. So at a season when birdwatchers come across a Pied Cuckoo and thoughts run wild as to its origin, birdwatchers will do well recalling Dr. Salim Ali's comments in his review of Herbert Friedmann's The Parasitic Cuckoos of Africa. Quoted in toto they read: "Considering the large numbers of Pied Crested Cuckoos which arrive to breed in north and central India during the south-west monsoon season every year, it is deplorable that so little is known of their movements. Whether this influx is merely from western Asiatic countries, or in fact from Africa, as has been suggested, can only be ascertained by the ringing method. In spite of obvious difficulties in the way of trapping adequate numbers of adult Pied Crested Cuckoos for the purpose, or of finding a reasonable quantity of their nestlings, it is nevertheless a line of field work which holds important possibilities and one that can be earnestly commended to those with the necessary opportunities" (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 48: 344-6).

Perhaps an appeal from the Editor to the readers of the Newsletter to work in the direction suggested by Dr. Salim Ali would go a long way off in making a beginning to solve the puzzle.

* * * *

INDIAN GREAT REED WARBLER (ACROCEPHALUS STENTOREUS)

K.S. Lavkumar.

David Fernandes and I visited the mangrove swamp between the National Highway and the Western Railway bridge across the Mahim Creek. It was a morning's walk through heavily polluted tidal mangrove thickets. With handkerchieves to keep off the stench we wanted to know how best the pollution sources might be diverted because the area is now marked to be a bird sanctuary.

5th June is mid-summer and as such the gulls and waders were totally absent, and the high level of pollution seemed to have reduced the Paddy Birds, Egrets and Whiskered Terns which are quite plentiful on marshy tracts close by. We were, however, impressed by the numbers of Reed Warblers flying around and singing; in fact, their presence was intrusive. Quite obviously the density of the birds and their vigorous song suggest that this is a residential and breeding population. Location of a nest or sighting of birds carrying nesting material, feed for nestlings or faecal packets would clinch the issue.

Besides the Reed Warblers we were impressed by the plentitude of Ashy Wren-Warblers (Prinia socialis) in the mangroves. Three Fantail Flycatchers (Rhipidura albicollis) caught me quite by surprise. Their presence was proclaimed by melodious ditties so characteristic of the species and confirmed by sighting a bird flitting, prancing, pirouetting and flaunting its fanned tail among the shrubs, at times in branches overhanging the filthy creek water and dirt impregnated soil.

It is quite apparent that once the mangrove forest grows tall with the stopping of seasonal cutting, many more resident species would breed regularly and a reduction of pollution would increase waterside species to augment the flocks of waders which throng the mudflats in the cold season.

Since 1930 Dr. Salim Ali has suspected the Reed Warbler breeding in similar habitats around Bombay, vide Hugh Whistler, J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 35: 450-54. Members living close to Mahim Creek or other similar areas around Bombay could help find nests of this warbler in the Bombay area.

* * * * *

TEREK SANDPIPER

Ananta Mitra, Calcutta.

It was the morning on 4.11.74. I was at the seashore at Digha, West Bengal. The vast beach with the sea to its south spreads east and west for miles.

A mixed flock of about 40 waders were hunting on the shore. There were little stints (Calidris minutus), Common Sandpipers (Tringa hypoleucos) and others.

Waves were breaking on the shore, spreading themselves and were receding back to the sea. The birds were moving back and forth with the waves. They were quickly picking up minute marine bodies with their agile beaks.

Among the picking beaks I located a pair of beaks behaving in a peculiar way.

On close observation I identified them to be Terek Sandpipers (Tringa terek). The birds with orange-coloured legs and upcurved beaks.

The particular contrivance of the beak was being utilised by the birds with masterly efficiency.

I briefly give below their mode of operation.

The seemingly level Digha beach has small undulations on its floor creating long furrows running perpendicular to the sea. When dashing waves recede from the shore they leave behind in these furrows long patches of water which take a little time to seep into the sand.

On the floor of these furrows Tringa Terek rests its upcurved beak and with mandibles slightly open glides through at considerable speed (See figure).



TRINGA TEREK

The gliding beak as it furrows through gathers into the mouth minute marine bodies that come its way. At each sally the bird covers 20 to 25 feet in seconds. They repeat their operation with each receding wave.

The masterly performance of the small birds was unique and interesting.

* * * *

SULTANPUR BIRD SANCTUARY IN SUMMER

R.K. Bhatnagar.

Much achievement is being envisaged for this bird sanctuary. In order to see the bird-life during summer heat, we visited the sanctuary on 30.4.75. We took the route from Palam Airport and on approaching Gurgaon suburbs, a guide board was seen on the left side of the road but put before the bifurcation. It would have been better if there were arrows indicating the route to be taken and also if the board were closer to the bifurcation. The guide board inside Gurgaon city was also somewhat inconspicuous in its location. I wonder why a prominent sign or symbol could not be adopted and simple boards with the symbol and arrow showing the route to be taken are erected. This would reduce the cost. The prominence of the board would also increase. Fields on road side of the sanctuary had heaps of harvested wheat and at some points it was being threshed. In the sanctuary we occasionally saw small flocks of sparrows, 4 brahminy mynas, about 17 crested larks and common babblers were many. But to our surprise the catchment area of the sanctuary (so called lake) was nearly completely dry, only in virtually dried depressions some moist ground could be seen. Most of the catchment area ground was cracked and whitish due to deposition of salts on the surface. This process of flooding the ground surface usually leads to the build up of salts on the surface on drying. This in turn effects the growth of vegetation in wet weather as germination is effected, adversely due to higher concentration of salts on the surface of the catchment area. However, if the flooding also brings about washed sedimentary strata, the ground fertility is increased or else salinity increases as is happening at many points along the river Luni in Rajasthan. Obviously, decreased vegetation due to this process would affect the food chain of insects and so forth. I wonder as to how much and in what manner this drying of catchment area would be affecting the food resources at the disposal of winter migrant species during the ensuing season in the sanctuary.

6.

Naturally, the first effect would perhaps be the reduced food supply which would reduce the number of birds and may affect some of the passage migrants also. I am not aware if any sort of population counts are being taken to compare influx of migrants and their period of stay in successive years, so that some assessment can be made of these aspects. I am also not aware if anywhere else in our country such studies are being taken up in relation to bird-life. However, in Rajasthan the ground salinity due to flooding and drying of the ground is being studied along the course of the river Luni by G.S.I. I therefore feel that this aspect would be of interest and deserves attention of the bird watchers visiting the sanctuary.

Glancing around the catchment area from the Watch-tower one feels that some trees are badly needed around banks and in the middle of the catchment area, preferably opposite the tower. This would provide the much needed perching sites for the migrants. The ground below the trees if deepened would retain water for a longer time than now and would be a good watering points to the resident birds. However, the watch tower is indeed beautifully designed and it would not be wrong to say that it is amongst the best in north India. In Dehra Dun and even in Corbett Park one finds, that many of the watch towers are out of place in design: white concrete pillars supporting a wooden hutment on top standing amidst serene landscape like a multi-storyed building in a village. Provision of some nesting boxes on trees would definitely increase watching pleasure. In Haryana, the black partridge population seems to have gone down considerably. Trial study on breeding in captivity of this partridge can be made in large field cages in the sanctuary of the campus. Incidentally it may be pointed out that in Japan, partridges are farmed. This may be tried in places like Poona, Gurgaon and areas of Punjab which throng with poultry farms.

* * * * *

BIRDS HELPING EACH OTHER

Anil K. Joseph & Verghese K. Joseph.

On the morning of 3rd June 1975 at about 8 a.m. three fledglings of the Indian Robin left their nest located in a clump of Mother-in-law's tongue (Liliaceae) growing in a pot in our garden in the Calicut University Campus. Along with their parents they flew and hopped into the bush growing under a nearby Cashew tree.

At about 10 a.m. we heard the churring distress calls of the parent birds, soon followed by the disorderly melee of distress calls of various other birds including the Purplerumped Sunbird, Common Babblers, Tailor Bird, Black Drongo, Common Myna, Red-vented Bulbul, Blackheaded Oriole and Spotted Dove. On closer approach, it was observed that a 2-foot long snake (unidentified) was proceeding close to the fledglings of the Indian Robin, then perched on some low bushes. Uttering churring calls both the parent birds and two Black Drongos could be seen darting over the head of the snake from one side to the other, while the other birds flitted from one branch of the Cashew tree to the other uttering their respective calls, probably in their effort to thwart the attempt of the snake to reach the fledglings. It is also likely that the distress calls of the parent Robins made the other birds go to the help of the Robins. And probably as a result of the concerted attack by the assembly of birds, the snake retreated from the scene.

The same scene was again witnessed the same day at about 3.30 p.m. But this time, for fear that the snake might kill the Robin fledglings, we threw stones at the snake and drove it away.

* * * *

EDITORIAL NOTE:

Readers of the Newsletter may be aware that a city known popularly as New Bombay is being built across the harbour. This is to cater for the expanding population of Bombay and for which there is no place in the limited confines of Bombay island and the existing suburbs.

The surroundings of New Bombay are to be planted with some millions of trees and the work seems to be progressing as shown in the photographs accompanying the news reports. The trees are to be fast growing trees. Furthermore, some fruit trees specially attractive to birds will be included.

One of the objects of growing trees is to retain moisture in the ground and to prevent soil erosion. For serving all these functions few trees can excel the great Pipul tree (Ficus religiosa) whose wide spreading roots can hold tenaciously even our river banks. The figs of this tree are greatly relished by orioles, barbets and a variety of birds. There are few living things in the world whose life spans can be measured in centuries and millenniums - the Pipul tree being one of them.

The tree planting at New Bombay is going to work out at Rs.5/= per person who is to live in New Bombay. This is a very small expenditure in a lifetime investment to ensure the neutralisation of the polluting effects of man - his breath and his cooking fires. In fact plants need the waste products of men provided the same are made available in continuous small quantities.

Even more praiseworthy is the action taken by the Government in stopping the construction of a road connecting the western suburbs to the eastern. The road making was well under way - several trees having been felled in the wooded area of the Aarey and National Park foot hills.

We owe much to the unceasing efforts of those few enlightened people who have fought for this cause and all praise is due to the authorities who have abandoned the project even after spending a considerable sum of money.

* * * *

CORRESPONDENCE:

Just a few observations I have made recently. The Koel's distinctive call of kuoo-kuoo-kuoo starts around the 23rd to 25th of March. But this year it started much earlier, I think I heard it the first time on the 7th or 8th of March. I thought this very unusual.

Another interesting fact is about babblers. I have been seeing the common babbler off and on in Poona. But this past year, I have heard and seen them in our own compound continuously from November last year, upto now. At first I thought may be they are migratory over short distances. But they seem to have come here to stay.

Dr. Miss G.D. Coyaji.

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COMPARATIVE STUDY OF BIRDWATCHING AT SUSAGOWAHATTI,
(Desur area, Belgaum).

Bro. A. Navarro.

Since it is not the first time that I have been birdwatching at Susagowahatti, Desur Area, I spent the October vacation here with the main objective of having a chance to make a comparative study of the observations of the rainy season and the dry season.

The Locality:

Desur area is a large plateau of high agricultural activity, with scattered settlements and small villages surrounded by distant hills on all sides and a few sholas here and there. Some parts of the forest mingle with the cultivated lands, an excellent combination of environment for wild life and a paradise for birdwatchers.

The Time:

From the twentyfifth of October until the second of November the weather was not suitable for moving about without the risk of unforeseen sudden showers, proper at the end of the monsoon; on account of the prolonged monsoon last year, the

farmers had not yet harvested their crops. The cultivated land was covered with tall grass. Therefore, the only way to go about, was through a footpath or bullockcart tracks; for the same reason movement throughout the forest was also restricted to a few well trodden tracks.

On my first outing I noticed the Painted Partridges were calling almost the whole day long; most of the calls were coming from open grounds, covered with thick, long grass; the calls from the cultivated areas were rare. As the season wore on and the rains ceased, the weather changed remarkably enough from wet to dry; the partridges dropped their calls and by the fifth of November the calls stopped altogether. The Jungle Quails confined themselves to the forested area and were often seen gracefully resting on open patches, and at other times cautiously making away through the undergrowth.

The common Seven Sisters of this locality are the White-headed Babblers seen in small parties on open ground, though more often they were found amongst bushes and groves of trees near the forest; their typical calls of tri-ri-ri constantly repeated as they went about were audible only at a very short distance; nonetheless, they would suddenly burst into a loud and pleasant whistling call and often utter a few squeaking noises, somewhat of a reminiscence of the Jungle Seven Sisters.

I soon discovered that the best time for observation was from sunrise upto 9.30 a.m.; by this time the weather conditions were rather windy so that even the birds were slowing down their activities. The only sounds that could be heard were the rustling of leaves and the swishing of the wind. The farmers gave me to understand that for a long time they have been following this weather indication as the time to start harvesting their crops.

The noisiest birds of the forest at this time were the Jungle Doves; at times the echoes of their calls resounded from every corner of the forest, and lasting often till about 11.00 a.m. when all the other birds had already long dropped their calls. After the Jungle Doves, the next noisiest group was the Scimitar Babblers; these have two different sounds: the first is a call, the second is a babbling noise. In this season, their calls sounded very much like koo-kroo-koo; at each call the female would answer with two distinct syllables: ko-ka. Quite often these would be called for a short time quite late in the evening.

Traversing the forest, I came across a double bullock-cart track, almost a mile long.

Being a quiet spot with abundance of bird activity criss-crossing the forest, I took this chance and had the opportunity of some interesting observations. Day after day, I would stroll along the track; on the first day I noticed small groups of Blossomheaded Parakeets with their erratic flights in all directions in the forest, uttering their typical calls, suddenly perching for a short moment of time on the tallest trees and flying away once more. At the same time the Jungle Fowl too were seen crossing the open track. The Rufous Shrikes were the only birds that were persistently flying up and down the track, never entering the forest; small flocks of Brahmany Mynas were silently flying about in the jungle; the Babblers (familiarily known as Seven Sisters) were often seen moving through the forest, not as noisy as usual. The Grey Headed Flycatchers were constantly on the move flying from branch to branch, cheerfully uttering loudly their sweet whistling song. Though a few Fantail Flycatchers were seen, yet the occasions on which I heard their short melodious tinkling song were very rare.

From the very first day I moved along the open track. Every day I heard, from the same spot, a puzzling, harsh, low, chattering sound which at short intervals burst into brief chuckling sounds, reminiscent of the chuckling calls of the Red Spur Fowl. On my last day I decided to solve the problem of the puzzling calls. Therefore, from the inner side of the forest, I cautiously made my way towards the likely spot of the source of these mysterious sounds, when suddenly from a nearby tree two birds flew off; luckily one of the birds flew across the open track and settled on a tall tree by the edge of the forest. From the day I heard the strange sounds, I thought it to be the calling of the small owlet. Now seeing the manner in which the bird was flying, it was evident that this was not an owlet. The bird called for a short time and again flew to a nearby tree and perched on a bare branch, and started calling once again. With the aid of a pair of binoculars, I saw the bird and it turned out to be the Blue-bearded Bee-eater. What struck my attention was the fact that at each call, the blue feathers of the throat puffed up; at the time of his calls, the head was being moved up and down in the manner described in The India Fauna, volume 4, page 243.

One thing that struck me with wonder quite often was the frequency with which I found the Paradise Flycatcher in the shadow patches of the forest; also the Shamas, flying gracefully among the trees, bushes, and creepers. Though the Paradise Flycatcher kept silent all the time, the Shamas were, at long intervals, uttering short melodious calls.

I also found the Ioras were confined to the forest and at the same time very noisy with their loud and monotonous calls, but without any co-ordination with each other.

During the first days I missed the familiar calls of the Green Barbets. It was only at the beginning of November when I heard them calling from different parts of the forest; their calls were short and low in intensity; they never went further than that sort of dueting or chorus which the Green Barbets seem to indulge in for long periods of time.

By the middle of November, I noticed a sudden outburst of bird activity. The Jungle Sparrow and Tits made their first appearance. Since then mixed noisy parties of small birds, most of them Babblers, Warblers, Bulbuls, Tits, Jungle Sparrows, were seen to be on the move, through the forest, in search of insects. Accidentally, I observed that the white bellied Drongos were apparently following these groups, in a manner as if they were not an integral part of the groups, but as a separated unit, nevertheless keenly following the groups at times nearer than otherwise. At this time, the Sunbirds and the Flower Peckers were also seen with greater frequency.

By this time the birds of the night, normally plentiful in this locality, were not yet heard, except a few stray calls of the Red Wattled Lapwing, the Yellow Wattled Lapwing and the Stone Curlew, audible now and then, through the night.

Dividing the birds of Desur area into two groups, the birds of the open land and the birds of the forest, I found that the birds of the first group were more constant: I found the same birds on the same spots as seen on previous occasions; with respect to the second group, the birds of the forest, I noticed that towards the end of the monsoon there were fewer birds in the forest area. All the same, this fluctuation among forest birds is a natural factor, Desur area being an area of heavy rainfall; given this condition, the birds move to areas of lesser rainfall, affording a better and more suitable environment.

As already mentioned, by the middle of November there was an outburst of bird activity: a sign that the birds were coming back to the forest area. Under identical weather conditions, I observed the same pattern of behaviour in the bird population on more than one occasion, in the Khandala region.

NESTING OF THE LITTLE EGRET : A NEW RECORD FOR KERALA

C. Mohankumar - S. Satheesh Chandran Nair - K.K. Neelakantan.

Since Dr. Salim Ali's BIRDS OF KERALA (1969) states that the breeding of the Little Egret (Egretta garzetta) has not been recorded in Kerala, we are happy to report the discovery of a small breeding colony at Kanyakulangara, about 18 km north of Trivandrum, on the Trivandrum-Kottarakkara Road.

On 9.1.1974 one of us (N) had a glimpse, from a fast-moving bus, of a tree full of egrets, at about 10 a.m. All efforts to locate that tree again failed. Eight months later, on another bus journey, N heard a young man beside him asking for a ticket to Vembayam, a place not far from where N had seen the egrets. When sufficient rapport had been established with the young man, N asked him whether he knew of any place where large white birds nested in company. Although the young man claimed that he was not interested in birds, he had noted that some pure white birds with black legs and bills did nest every year in a tree standing close to the mosque at Kanyakulangara. Unfortunately, he could not remember their nesting season. As the birds had been first noted in January, S.S. and N visited this place on 12.1.'75 and found only a few deserted nests, fragments of egg-shell, some feathers and bones. They gathered that breeding starts only in June or July.

On 23.vi.'75 M went to Kanyakulangara and found that most of the Little Egrets had well-grown chicks already. He discovered that many pairs of Pond Herons were also nesting within the mosque compound a few yards east of the egrets' tree. The three of us spent two hours at the heronry on 29.vii and found that there were more than 25 nests of the Little Egret and a single nest of the Pond Heron on the large tree, and a much larger number of Pond Heron nests distributed over some 15 square yards of jungle on the eastern side. Although most pairs of both species had well-grown juveniles, a few Little Egret nests held tiny squabs. One Little Egret and some Pond Herons were sitting in their nests, presumably incubating.

According to the local people, egrets started nesting here only 10 or 12 years ago. They say that the large tree is used as a roost throughout the year. Small numbers of Cattle Egrets are regularly seen during the rains in parts of Kottarakkara Taluk, but none was found in or near this heronry.

At present the birds are tolerated rather than protected at this place. The location is itself greatly in the birds' favour. Still, we heard that it was possible to get permission

to shoot the birds if one paid Rs.5/= to the right person! In view of the fact that this is the only known breeding place of any kind of Egret in Kerala, we hope that it will be possible to persuade the authorities of the mosque to provide full protection to the birds.

* * * * *

ON FINDING THE NESTLINGS OF REDWATTLED LAPWING (Vanellus indicus)

A.K. Chakravarthy & P.M. Govindakrishnan - Bangalore.

On 13th June, 1975 we saw a pair of Redwattled Lapwing taking off from a particular spot on the ground, uttering their alarm call, and betraying thus their young ones to us. The nestlings were three in number, two huddled together, and one astray was a yard away. The chicks appeared to be a couple of hours old, thumb-sized and perfectly blending with the surroundings in their brown and black mantle. Mr. D. Ray (Newsletter 12:(6) 1-4) gives a perfect description of the chicks. According to him, "they (the chicks) were the size of day old 'desi murghi chicks' only longer in the neck and legs. The back and wings earthy brown, speckled and mottled in black, with a cap on the head of a similar colour. The neck, underparts were white and a faint black necklace across the breast." In addition we would like to mention that the legs were folded, dark greyish in colour, and appeared more skinny than scaly. The beak was brownish in colour, and the upper mandibles had a pair of small holes on either side of the culmen. Pebbles scattered around the clutch suggested that this spot, in all probability, was the nesting site.

Mr. V.S. Saxena surmises in his excellent article, "Unusual Nesting by Redwattled Lapwing", (Newsletter 14 (11) 3-5) that the nesting site of the Lapwing could probably have a bearing on the occurrence of a flood. He goes to narrate how the unusual nesting of Redwattled Lapwing on the roof of a garage was followed by a flood in Bharatpur. We, finding the nesting site at low ground level, thought in the reverse, and sensed almost a drought in Bangalore! But the rain goddesses were more merciful, and Karnataka particularly Bangalore experienced a heavy fall of rain soon after.

* * * * *

A FREE FOR ALL

Ashok Kumar Sharma - Jaipur.

On 2nd July 1975 at about 4 p.m. I saw an interesting scene.

A House Crow (Corvus splendens) holding a Ringed Dove (Streptopelia decaocto) in its claws and beak came flying. Suddenly two Indian Mynas (Acridotheres tristis) flew after it screaming constantly "Kwee---, Kwee---, Kwee---". The puzzled crow came down on a parapet wall.

The mynas still chased it. The crow cawed at them and moved towards them stretching its neck as if to strike them with its beak. The frightened mynas leaped back but kept screaming louder than before. A Black Drongo (Dicrurus adsimilis) came on the scene surely attracted by the screaming of mynas. The Black Drongo pounced upon the crow. Frightened by this sudden attack the crow left the ringed dove. The drongo flew up and hurled itself down on the crow several times. The crow cawed and raised its head as if pleading for mercy or to protect itself from the Black Drongo with its beak.

During this attack the mynas screamed constantly to cheer the Black Drongo.

A Brahminy Myna (Sturnus pagodarum), a Redvented Bulbul (Pycnonotus cafer) and some House Crows joined the scene. The Brahminy Myna and the Redvented Bulbul merely looked on. But the crows fought for the crow, cawing and circling around the drongo who still continued its attack. Meanwhile the Ringed Dove gathered its nerves and hid itself under a low bush.

The Black Drongo chased by crows or after seeing that the ringed dove was safe, flew and perched on an electric wire overhead. Mynas also stopped screaming and flew to a nearby tree.

The crow was so frightened that it dared not see where its quarry had gone. After some moments it looked down the wall for the dove. Not seeing it there, it came down the wall to look for it. But the mynas again came screaming attracting the Black Drongo, who came diving at the crow. The crow returned to the wall again. The drongo again pounced in the same manner upon the crow frightening it so much that it flew cawing, towards a nearby tree. This time other crows didn't come to the rescue of their fellow. The Black Drongo and mynas also returned back to their perches.

Mr. Sharma has given a graphic account of this fast moving action packed incident. It must have been quite difficult to observe all the details that have been described.

The question is, does a crow carry anything in its claws?

A number of years ago in an article in the N.L. Mr. Jayaraman had casually mentioned a crow carrying a stick in its claws. Dr. Salim Ali pointed out that a crow carries objects by holding them in its bill and not by clutching the same by its claws.

Readers of the N.L. who see crows or other perching birds carrying anything in their claws, are requested to send in their observations.

- Ed.

* * * * *

EDITORIAL NOTE:

The editor must remind readers that the Newsletter is sustained only by the articles contributed by the readers. It is difficult to bring out the issues month after month without accumulating beforehand a reasonable pile of matter inclusive of an interesting product-mix.

Also comments and criticisms of Newsletter articles should be made in writing and published. After all we are here to participate in lively dialogues and discussions through the Newsletter. There is no point in being discouraged by criticism. Rather, it is discouraging if no interest is taken and no critical or corroborative comment is made after the publication of a note.

* * * * *

CORRESPONDENCE:

Sandpiper Feeding on a Building.

The fish wharf at Karwar (Karnataka) is today almost entirely a concrete structure, but in one corner a small area of the original wooden planking still survives. Just after 7 p.m. in mid-March I saw a solitary Common Sandpiper (Tringa hypoleucos) tripping daintily over these planks (which stand some seven feet above water level) and stopping every now and then to peck and tug at some objects scattered over their surface. Loungers sat, watching the fading daylight, not far off; less than a hundred feet away, launches were noisily unloading baskets of fly-covered prawns. The bird allowed me to approach (slowly,

of-course) quite close before it flew off, and I then discovered that the objects of its interest had been the severed heads of quite large prawns, obviously far too big for the Sandpiper to swallow whole and surely too tough to be pulled to pieces.

This observation seemed to me worth recording for the bird's unusual hunting-ground, even more than for the unsuitable nature of the food in which it was showing interest. Are there any other records of a Sandpiper feeding or hunting on a building?

Thomas Gay.

* * * * *

"Birdwatching (or Searching) in Mizoram" by Ishwar Prakash, appeared in the June, 1975 issue, makes interesting reading. This is really surprising that such an efficient and experienced Bird Watcher, could not locate many birds. The major factor that could be attributed to the detriment of the avifauna, is the 'omni-non-vegetarian diet' of the Mizos. Dr. Ishwar Prakash has also indicated three other reasons, viz. i) seasonal altitudinal migration, ii) Bamboos covered area and iii) Jhum-paddy cropping pattern. I would like to add another one to the list, it is the presence of a large number of armed personnel in the area (Army personnel have been responsible for killing a large number of animal population whenever stationed in an area with their sophisticated weapons). I have also an experience of working in Tripura where Shifting Cultivation is a common practice. The Jhum areas are not Bird desert by any stage of imagination. A large number of birds have been seen from time to time in Jhum areas including Jampui hills of Tripura (which are adjacent to Mizoram). Quite a good number of birds were seen by me about a decade back in Jhum areas. Some of your other readers who have worked or are working in that area would bear me out that areas affected by Jhum cultivation and bamboo forests, are not very poor in bird population. Hornbills, Jungle fowl, Kaliz pheasant were not uncommon in Jampui hills. Hornbills were common and were hunted for hornbill fat.

H.N. Mathur.

* * * * *

Forgive my ignorance. What is Jhum cultivation?

- Ed.

Shape of Bill and Its Significance:

Regarding the skillful adaptation of the upcurved bill of TEREK SANDPIPER (*Tringa terek*), a note of my observation has been published in July '75 issue of the Newsletter (Vol. XV, No. 6, page 4).

In this connection I have come across a passage - in respect of this bird - occurring at page 270 Vol. 2, of the renowned work - "Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan" by Salim Ali and Ripley.

The passage runs as follows :-

"Whether the peculiar upturned shape of the bill has any special adaptive significance remains to be studied."

Now, it may be suggested that my observation published in the above note may throw light on the adaptive significance of the bill of TEREK SANDPIPER.

Ananta Mitra.

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Olfaction in Birds:

A news item entitled HOMING PIGEONS SMELL THEIR WAY has appeared on page 10 of Science Today of June, 1975. It is interesting to note that to the list of several navigational aids birds are supposed to make use of, one more is added by a research team of the University of Pisa, Italy, headed by Prof. Floriano Papi. This is olfaction. "...their experiments showed that the birds were able to pick up smells several kilometers away. They detected pine scent in wind blowing from Arnino, Northern Italy, and olive scent from the breeze blowing from Miero, 45 km south of Arnino. By following the smells, the birds could perhaps plot a north-south course."

Olfaction in birds is a matter of dispute. At any rate some birds are apparently lacking this faculty altogether.

T.V. Jose.

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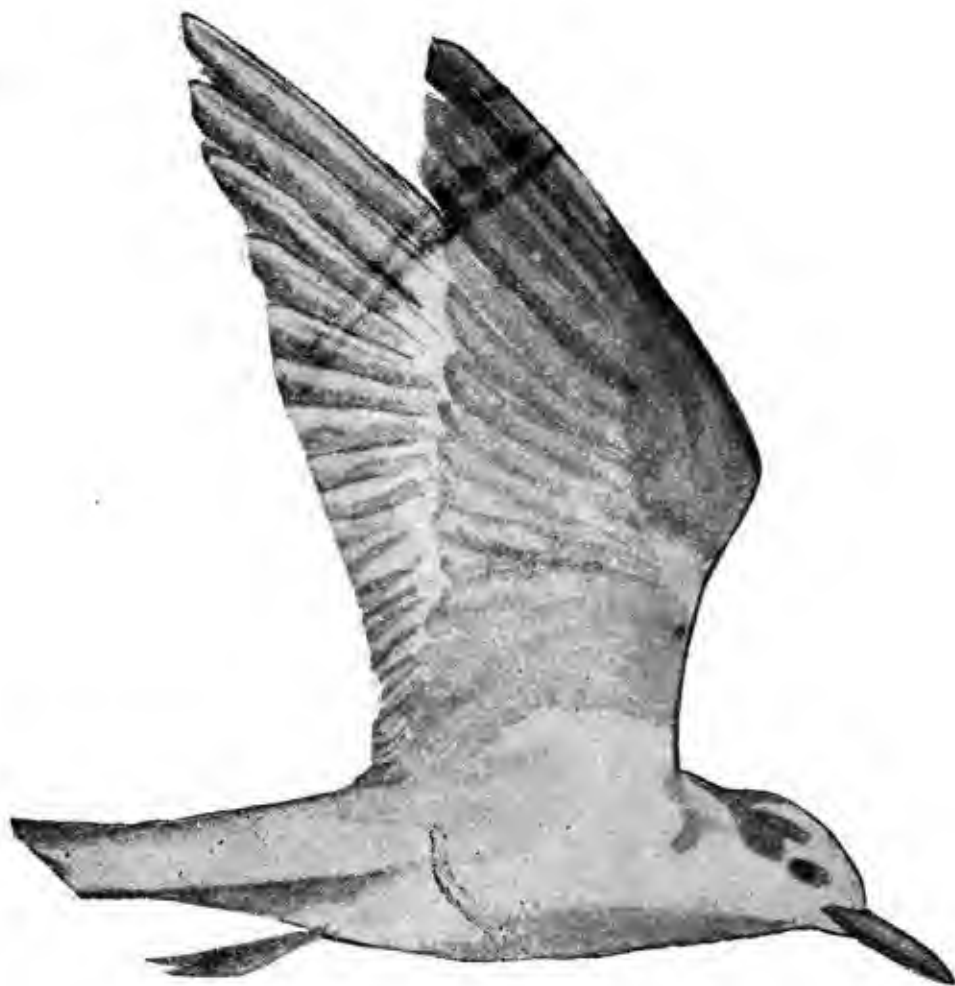
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THE GHANA BIRD SANCTUARY - BHARATPUR.

Mrs. D.E. Aranha.

Ever since reading E.P. Gee's chapter on "The Breeding Birds of Bharatpur" in WILD LIFE OF INDIA, I have longed to visit the Ghana Bird Sanctuary. Recently an opportunity arose and my husband and I spent a very pleasant two days there in beautiful surroundings. The Wild Life Warden, Mr. B.S. Chandra, ensured that we had a comfortable and enjoyable stay and we were given the services of the very knowledgeable guide, Hukam Singh for our boat trip around the lake.

Hukam informed us that the area of the lake (which is not more than 5 feet deep and more like a marsh) is about 6 miles. None of the migratory birds except a few ducks had arrived but as it was the nesting season, the residential birds were present in great numbers. We were most impressed with the Painted Storks which we had never seen before. These majestic birds co-existed peacefully with small and large egrets, white ibises, cormorants, grey herons and spoonbills. We also saw a few darters and all the acacia trees, with the exception of those growing too near the shore, were full of nests and fledglings. The surface of the lake was dotted with lotuses, tiny yellow and white flowers and duckweed. We got a glimpse of a coot and two

jacanas and also found 4 jacana eggs on a floating leaf. On some trees nearer the shore the weaver birds had built their nests and we found the turtle doves alighting on trees where the waterbirds had congregated. The whitebreasted kingfisher was the only species seen though we were told the pied one is also a visitor.

The sanctuary is criss-crossed with several good roads and pathways and a walk along any of these is very rewarding. Throughout the day the cooing of the turtle doves mingled with the harsher call of the ring doves. The chattering to the common babblers, the screeching of the roseringed parakeets and the calls of the pied mynas, brahminy mynas (very much in evidence), red-vented bulbuls (very few in number) and the koels added to the chorus. Indian robins, magpie robins and perky tailor birds were also seen and we were constantly amused by the hoopoes whose curious gait and pecking at the ground reminded me of old busybodies. In some cases we spotted only a single bird of a species such as a fishing eagle, a Mahratta woodpecker and a tree pie. Since the marshy area abuts the roadside, we often disturbed the sentinel-like pond herons or an occasional large egret or cormorant waiting patiently to catch their dinner. Overhead we would hear the whoosh of wings and see the large painted storks wending their way to their nests with long strands of grass dangling from their beaks. I was surprised to note that they also keep circling in flocks high in the sky rather like vultures and that during the heat of the day they spread their wings like open umbrellas to shield the young ones from the sun. Flocks of cotton teal, ducks and cormorants would fly by in formation but we found it rather difficult to distinguish the ducks from the cormorants.

At the entrance to "Shanti Kutir", the guest house, there is a large tree and on the lower branch a nighjar is in residence. We enjoyed seeing him morning and early evening blending perfectly with his perch and always in the same position as though he had been glued on.

There were several birds I could not identify. In the surrounds I saw a black and white bird which looked like a magpie robin but on closer inspection found it had a white shin and breast and resembled the pied flycatcher shrike to a certain extent. There was a beautiful flowerpecker too which did not resemble the ones in the Book of Indian Birds. On one of our walks we saw two birds - one blackish grey with practically no tail and a very red beak. On describing it to Hukam he was certain it was the Indian Moorhen and it tallied with the picture in the Bird Book. The second was black with bronze wings and two white

streaks near the eye. It did resemble the ~~bronze-winged~~ Jacana somewhat but we are not too certain. On a solitary walk I saw a dove-like bird but though shape and colour were the same it had no markings except for a checker-board back. Another bird I mistook for a young crow pheasant as it was black with reddish specks on the wings but it lacked the long tail and red eyes. However, it hopped into a bush on which an adult crow pheasant was perched. I can only hope that among the specimens at the BNHS I will be able to identify some of them.

We were sorry when it was time to leave the sanctuary but that evening at the railway station saw something memorable. A flock of egrets suddenly wheeled into sight and after taking a half circle, the whole flock, as one, paused in flight as though they had suddenly applied brakes, and settled on a large tree at the end of the platform. Presumably they were small egrets since we had not sighted any cattle egrets. I have seen cattle egrets approach their resting place either singly or in pairs but never a whole flock settle down together so to me it was a remarkable sight.

I would recommend the Ghana Bird Sanctuary to any bird lover. A new tourist bungalow is under construction and from its terrace we viewed two nilgai, a spotted deer and a wild pig. We also saw several jackals and hares but on account of the heavy rains, few animals were to be seen. Last but not least, apart from comfortable lodgings and a warm welcome from the Warden for a genuine nature lover, the Sanctuary has a rather eccentric but exceptionally capable cook.

* * * * *

USEFULNESS OF NEWSLETTER

S.R. Shah.

At Gaurikund (Kedarnath trek), just at the foot of "Baba Kali Kamliwala" Dharmshala, a sulphur spring joins the swift flowing icy waters of Mandakini river. We went there to wash clothes. I took out my alarm wrist watch and put it on a near by stone. Then I was busy washing clothes. At 5 P.M. the time of our second dose of afternoon tea, the alarm rang. The distraction was god-sent because we saw three milk white birds flying towards us from downstream. At the first glimpse my wife shouted "Paradise flycatchers" ! but as soon as they settled on a muddy and grassy boulder on the opposite bank we made out that they were fork tails even though we saw them for the first time in our lives. That was on 18-10-73, we went to kedarnath and returned on 20th. This time we went to the same spot for bird watching because besides forktails we had seen dippers, white capped and plumbeous redstarts,

last time. Again we saw the forktails arriving seconds after the alarm went off. But the conclusion did not strike my tube-light mind. As soon as I read the article "Chronological time sense in birds" by Dr. Salim Ali, the October observation flashed in my mind. I felt a feeling of gratitude to the newsletter.

The Lake Gajner story should impress the contributors to Newsletter the importance of mentioning the month, time and spot in case of rare and extraordinary sightings e.g. if Shri Lavkumar (An appeal - in the same issue) had mentioned the date and time, it would have helped a birdwatcher in planning the month when he should visit The Lake Chilka and what time he should be near the island in the middle of the lake for watching the string of falconiformes.

* * * * *

BIRDS ON ELATED TERMITE SWARM IN AIRPORT AREAS

- A HAZARD TO AIRCRAFT .

R.K. Bhatnagar.

While returning from Palam Airport here, in early morning of 20th July, 75, the intermittent drizzle of past 2-3 days had stopped. There was a mild breeze but the sky was still overcast. There I happened to witness wide scale predation of elated termite (specific identification pending) by a flying congregation of birds. In recent years I had not seen such a flying congregation of birds and the sight of birds showing multifarious flying manoeuvres appeared very interesting when they were busy predating on the termites flying in the sky with wind direction (E/W). Naturally I had to stop to watch and the observations revealed some points of applied significance. I put forth these as I find that information on certain aspects is lacking in Indian literature.

The termite swarm was on both sides of Gurgaon Road leading to Palam Airport, over ground area of about 1 mile x 1 mile. Location was roughly 30 NE of Palam Airport on open land. Thus swarming of termites was considerable in size and coverage. It could have been from more than one subterranean termite colony for a trek in the area did not reveal any mound. Swarming of elated termites is reported to be a phenomena connected with spread of colonies when high humidity and percolation of rain water activates the elated forms to escape. It usually commences in late evening and continues upto early morning hours and casually during mid-day.

The congregation of birds comprised Common Kites (Milvus migrans); some Blackwinged Kites (Elanus caeruleus); Common Crows (Corvus macrorhynchos); (C. splendens); few Mynas (Acridotheres tristis); few Drongos (Dicrurus adsimilis) and few Sparrows (Passer domesticus). Most dominant group of birds in the congregation was 'Cheel' (upto 60 on one side of road) followed by Jungle Crow. To my surprise I did not see any Roller (Coracias benghalensis). Elsewhere too within Delhi region these appear scarce. If I correctly remember, sometime back there was a report that population of Milvus migrans is getting reduced in country side. This does not seem so in Delhi region. May be that only in congregation one gets reasonable sound assessment of their number as in this case. However, if the total population had been attracted (as in this case), then population of roughly 60 plus 60 definitely appears very low considering the area of Delhi.

/be In airports, elated termites might be getting attracted to runway lights too as in our homes these are attracted to lights. There, presence of nocturnal predators like insectivore mammals, including bats; birds and reptiles can-not be over-ruled. This may pose hazards like skidding collision with aircrafts on runways. Literature on Indian termites does not reveal any information on responses of termites to coloured lights of yellow, amber, green, red & blue (as on runways). Similarly colour responses, if any, in nocturnal predatory aves, reptiles and other vertebrates on availability of food at light, remains to be ascertained by workers in India. However, recent American literature show that bird strikes on high cooling towers can be averted during rough weathers & otherwise by guiding the swarming birds away from the towers by putting red lights on top. This shows that response exists and hence likelihood of attraction of birds on termites at runway lights or on other food material exists.

Obviously, solution to the problem lies in the control of subterranean termites. In these it is difficult to locate the actual colony. So chemical control by direct application of toxic chemical appears difficult. However, Peshwani K.M. (un pub.) observed that 5% BHC dust can be spread on newspaper under lamp posts, under which the de-elated termites will drop and get killed. This reduces the hazards due to attraction of diurnal predatory bird population (at termite swarm) as their population is higher than nocturnal birds.

Here it appears reasonably correct to point out that in all airports vast land tracts are maintained barren. These are gradually covered with grasses which in turn gradually start supporting a chain of insects and other faunal groups and finally the vertebrate groups, contributing various factors,

of which food and shelter are the main. It was the food (-forage) that seems to have attracted 4-5 Blue bulls sometimes back in the Palam Airport. It is the shelter that attracts feral pigeons to hangers in urban situations. Obviously solution to this problem is that either we do not disturb natural shelters of animals or we provide shelters to them in suitable places where they do not conflict with our interests and it is high time that engineers take up designing bird proof architecture.

So this natural predation of termite (winged/slated) is alright as a natural biological control. But in airport areas it deserves attention. I suggest that it be included in control and maintenance duty schedule. It should not be a simple matter of blaming the birds as hazards to aircrafts but the cause should be investigated.

* * * *

EDITORIAL NOTE:

Recently when an aeroplane from India to Europe was delayed en route for some repairs the entire consignment of live bird cargo perished. The birds died of thirst. Nobody cared to attend to them.

According to the papers vast numbers of birds are trapped by professional trappers operating from the Varanasi region. These birds are trussed up or caged in miserable conditions and sold to buyers who in turn sell to exporters. In the course of trapping and handling or rather mishandling at various stages nine out of ten birds must perish. Meanwhile one presumes that haggling over prices and waiting for transportation will go on endlessly. The only reason for giving water or food during this process is the sordid fact that a dead bird will not fetch any price.

It is also to be noted that many of the birds that are exported are winter visitors to India. This means that the mass slaughter of birds not only affects the natural balance in the region of trapping but also in the breeding grounds of the birds. Therefore, not only the Government of India but those who are in charge of the breeding grounds of these birds should exercise some control so that live birds are collected only by authorised people and sent only to properly managed zoos.

* * * *

CORRESPONDENCE:

What is Jhum Cultivation?

Jhum Cultivation is a method of cultivation in which natural vegetation consisting of shrubs, trees, bamboos etc., is cut, dried and burnt before crops are sown in the area. The crops sown may include Paddy or hill paddy usually of coarse type, minor millets, maize, cash crops like Til, cotton, vegetables and other crops. This is mostly practiced by tribals in backward areas. The English equivalent of Jhum Cultivation is Shifting Cultivation. This cultivation is practised in Assam where it is known as Jhum Cultivation; in Orissa it is known as Podu Cultivation and in South India as Kumri.

(This is in reply to Editor's comments on Page 9 of the Newsletter of August-Sept. 1975 - "Forgive my ignorance. What is Jhum Cultivation?")

H.N. Mathur.

* * * *

Brief Observation at the Ballabgarh
Community Health Centre.

I would like to present a brief observation at the Ballabgarh Community Health Centre. There is a pure white babbler which has been mixing easily with the other babblers and is seen frequently around the area. I do not know how common the albino babblers are, but I thought this would be of interest to members of the Society. Dr. Lalit Nath of the IBWL showed me this bird.

A. Mangalik.

* * * *

Perching Birds Carrying things in their Claws.

I have seen common house crows scooping fish (about the size of a finger) floating on water with their feet. The fish that is thus grabbed may be passed from the feet to the beak while flying; if this is not done, the fish falls off from its grip before long. The entire activity is marked by sheer clumsiness and frequent failure.

I have never seen a jungle crow doing the same feat. Also, I have not seen a house crow carrying a bigger object or any living thing in its feet.

T.V. Jose.

Naming of Birds

In reply to Mr. Gay's question, I would like to assure him that the "Yellow-eyed Babbler" has indeed a very red iris. But, (as Seleneucus the elder so perceptibly remarked in about 225 B.C.), "Ornithologists are notoriously colour-blind"!! The only other reasonable and lucid explanations I can offer for the naming of this bird, are as follows and those interested may have their choice of a reason :-

- 1) The term "yellow-eyed" refers to the shape of the bird's eye, and not to the colour of its iris.
- 2) The eye of the bird undergoes a seasonal or altitudinal variation in colour.
- 3) The term "yellow-eyed" refers to the white ring around the Iris, and which 'white' ring is generally obscured by the bird's eyelashes.
- 4) That the taxonomist who undertook to christen the bird, had jaundice at the time.

If Mr. Gay is still mystified, I may draw his attention to the analogous case of the 'American Compass-tailed Cuckoo' of which two races occur. The northern race has the tail pointing northwards, and the southern race has the tail pointing southwards. And now, if Mr. Gay may consider himself sufficiently enlightened upon the point, I have a few questions to ask myself :-

Can anyone acquaint me with the present day status of what many consider to be the most beautiful parrot in all the world, i.e. Gould's Paradise Parrot (*Psephotus pulcherrimus*)? One can only glean the most cryptic references to this bird, such as, believed to have become extinct in the early nineteenth century, rediscovered in the 1900's. Since then, isolated pairs recorded. In a very recent issue of "Wildlife"

featuring the related Golden-shouldered parrot (*Psephotus chrysopteregius*), the Paradise Parrot was regarded as lost. The Red Data Book is even more vague and indefinite regarding this bird. The Golden-shouldered and the Paradise Parrots breed in termite mounds in Australia's semi-desert country and the Golden-shouldered Parrot has now been induced to breed in artificial termite mounds as it is also a gravely threatened species. Sir Edward Hallstrom has also succeeded in breeding this bird at his Famous Nondugl Sanctuary in New Guinea. The Golden-shouldered and the Paradise Parrot (which has a crimson shoulder) seem to have been wiped out by the pet bird trade earlier in this century. Magnificent illustrations of both birds may be found in John Gould's Tropical Birds.

- Winston Creado.

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NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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NEWSLETTER FOR
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RANDOM NOTES

Zafar Futehally.

If I remember right I sent a note to the Newsletter some months ago when we were at 269, Rajmanal Vilas Extn., Bangalore. We have now moved into our new house at Dodda-Gubbi, eight miles away from Bangalore City. Our plot of land is about 5 acres, but for miles around there are no ugly structures as yet, and the view of the sky and the agricultural lands next door has turned us into "lotus eaters". We gaze at the sunrise and the sunsets and in between have some rest to keep our aesthetic antennas in good order.

I am writing this from the S.E. Railway Hotel in Ranchi at 7-15 a.m. on 29.10.1975. Since I have a couple of hours before the business of the day commences, I thought I might write a few lines about the birds of Ranchi and Bangalore. The hotel garden is very pleasing, with wide well tended lawns and plenty of large trees: Jacaranda, Jack Fruit, Mango, Cassia, Eucalyptus. In a half hour round this morning I saw Grey headed Mynas, Pied Mynas, Common Mynas, Spotted Doves. There was a sunbird calling, but I could not make out whether it was Purple or Purple-rumped. White-eyes are always around here, and their jolly sibilant calls are a pleasure to hear. I understand from Jamal Ara that Wagtails

and Willow Warblers have arrived, but I have not seen any. On a dead tree, without any leaves, but just the branches there were 49 crows (yes I counted them!) and they were all positioned to see a Shikra on a neighbouring tree. From time to time a crow would attack the Shikra, but apart from ducking its head, the hunter took no notice of the lesser breeds. This bird was very heavily cross barred with brown on its russet-cream plumage on the underside. The colouration of Shikras is often very deceptive.

We have a couple of pairs of Shikras in and around our garden in Bangalore. They are noisy birds and the Black Drongos are always ready to fly up at them. Incidentally the trees on our small estate in Bangalore are still very young. There are about 150 trees, a mixture of mango, chikoo and guavas, but none are above 10' in height as yet. It will be interesting to watch the changing complex of bird life as the trees grow and provide more shade and cover. The permanent residents on our land are : Redvented Bulbuls, Black Drongos, Spotted Munias, Whitethroated Munias, Roseringed Parakeets, Pied Bush-chats, flocks of Ashycrowned Finch Larks, Large Pied Wagtails (Motacilla madaraipatensis), Spotted Doves, Common Green Bee-eaters, Whiteheaded Kingfisher, Blue Jay, Common and Jungle Mynas, Grey Partridge and Bustard Quail (Turnix suscitator). The female quails keep drumming at all hours of the day. I think there are two females of this polyandrous species holding territories in different areas.

Salim Ali says in the Handbook that the breeding habits of these quails would make a good subject for detailed study. I thought that all these birds would be able to keep down the insect pests on the land. But they seem to be no match for the hairy caterpillars which multiply by the thousands on the mango trees. Much against my will, we have had to use BHC to keep them down. It is of course unfair to expect that birds would be able to deal with the large quantities of pests which result from the monoculture practices of man. The stability of nature depends on variety, but this is against human practices of uniformity and standardisation.

About a mile to the East of our house there is the Dodda-Gubbi tank. It is very full this year and I am hoping that it will be full of duck after a month or two. Last week I saw four Spot-bills, Painted Storks, Redwattled Lapwings, and several Whistling teal. The only migrants which I have seen this season are Common Swallows, White Wagtails, Grey Wagtail, and the Little Brown Shrike.

Finally this note is sent in the hope that something is better than nothing.

* * * *

CHILKA LAKE

Ananta Mitra, Calcutta.

The rain was slow to depart this year. Air was moist and warm. With scattered hillocks in its vast bed and the hovering clouds above, still and blue Chilka, was fascinating.

In the late afternoon on 21.10.75, we were at Rambha, observing birds from the bank of the lake.

In the evening sky a flock of ducks made their appearance. They seemed to be Lesser Whistling teals (Dendrocygna javanica). We counted 24 of them. Following them there appeared a second flock of 46 birds. Soon thereafter the third flock sailed in, with about 150 birds. With extended necks and flapping of wings they flew in formation.

We detected one peculiarity in their movement. Maintaining the speed and direction of flight, they were altering their formation from moment to moment. The wedge formation changed shape in the air from right angle to acute angle and vice versa. The phenomenon invites closer examination.

In the meadows we discovered Small Indian skylarks (Alauda gulqula). Rising high in the sky they were pouring songs and were sharply swooping down to disappear in the grasses.

As dusk set in, a pair of Spotted Owlet (Athene brama) silently moved in, and took their perch on the telegraph wires. At nightfall we heard their screeches piercing the silence of the night.

On the next morning - after a colourful sunrise - we took boats to cruise in the lake. Our boatmen were Dandapani Bera and his young son Bejoy. Our observation started with a flock of cattle egret (Bubulcus ibis). With tucked up necks they were flying north in formation.

As we moved on, a large predator whirled round to our sight. It was a white-bellied sea eagle (Haliaeetus leucogaster), hunting for prey. Dandapani named it as 'KURUBALA' and said that sometimes they prey upon the floating ducks, coming

upon them with lightning speed. On occasions wounded ducks which slipped out of the eagles' grip are picked up by fishermen. Last year Dandapani was fortunate to bag one such duck.

On this morning too, we found several flocks of teals moving fast in formation. Our boatman said that the local name of this bird is "GENDI HANSA".

Our next encounter was with Little terns (Sterna albifrons). With rapid twists and turns they were scanning the water and were making occasional dives. For moments they disappeared in water and showed up the next moment in sharp ascent.

Other birds which came to our view were Little Cormorants, Brown-headed Gulls, Common Sandpipers, Red-wattled Lapwings, Brahminy Kites and Pariah Kites. A Pariah Kite secured a fish in its claws and took it to a nearby rock.

After two hours' pleasant boating we drew near our destination the 'CHARAI PAHARI' - the Bird Island. It is just a large hillock about 150 feet high, encircled in water and covered with trees. Dandapani informed us that during winter, migratory ducks, geese and other birds perch and roost here in thousands.

Incidentally we learnt that in other islands of the lake like NALABANA, NUAPARA, SATAPARA, etc. varieties of birds from flamingos to plovers are found in abundance.

We moored our boat and landed on the Bird island. Loud calls of coucals were coming from the forest. Some birds already listed were found there. Among bamboos and other flora in the island, we discovered a number of Thaapsasia populnea (Paras Pipal) adorning the hills with their pretty blossoms.

Circumnavigating the island we started back. During the return we encountered the Gull-billed Terns (Gelochelidon nilotica).

At Rambha we put up at the state-owned guest house, known as Pantha Niwas, situated on the bank of the lake in charming surroundings. Birds with their songs, coos and calls kept our hours in enchantment. Crowning them there were the booming calls of a group of langurs who had taken up residence in a large banyan tree near the lodge.

Chilka Lake - the biggest in our country - has an area of 450 Sq. miles (1,165 Sq. K.M.). It holds a number of big and large rocky islands covered with foliage. Its saline water contains varieties of marine-food loved by birds.

From time immemorial different orders of avifauna - resident and migratory - have found their happy homes in these sheltered lonely islands.

They await proper exploration by the ornithologist.

* * * *

WARDING OFF DANGER

J.S. Serrao.

That parakeets can rally round to ward off a marauder from nest vicinity long before the latter attacks their eggs or young was witnessed by me on 25th October in the Borivli National Park. I was watching a pair at a nest-hole in a dead palmyra - one of the pair inside the hole and the other clinging at the entrance. A Brahminy Kite which was quartering the area low over tree-tops happened to stumble over the palm the pair was on. With a screech the bird clinging to the nest-hole took off and winged an ascending flight to meet the kite, swearing as it did so. Soon it was joined by the individual inside the nest hole, and both started mobbing the kite, keeping up all the while a noisy screeching. This attracted six other Roseringed Parakeets which joined in the melee, flying all round the kite, swearing all the while, and jabbing it on its unguarded sides. Thus harried on all sides the kite started flying off from the area, the parakeets still swearing and following it until it was quite some distance from the nest tree.

And as I witnessed this co-operation and foresight of the parakeets E.H.N. Lowther's passage extolling the virtues of this most maligned bird flashed across my mind, which reads: "Poor parrots! the sahib and the ryot have no love for you owing to the damage you do in the garden and to the crops in the fields. And yet, in spite of the awful noise you made every evening, and every morning long before it was dawn - except in your nesting season when you scarcely visited me; in spite too of the havoc you wrought amongst my fruit trees, I have a very tender spot in my heart for you and wish you a long and happy innings in the dear old compound. I was always delighted when towards the end of February or in early March I found you had appreciated my hospitality and you and your wife had decided to bring up your family in a hole of one of my trees. Nowhere

were your three or four white eggs, or young, safer. Our sex has often been accused of paying too little attention to the nursery, but you were ever a model husband, taking turns with your Better Half in incubating the eggs, and later working like a slave to feed your young. Farewell, and Good Luck to you!" (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 40: 424: 1938).

* * * * *

EDITORIAL NOTE:

The time has come to inject new life into the Newsletter and the activities of the Field Club.

Members will recall that the existence of the Newsletter is entirely due to its founder Mr. Zafar Futehally and to the sustained efforts he had put into it to keep it going.

Therefore, when he left Bombay and migrated to Bangalore a sort of vacuum was created at the very apex of the organisation. My efforts to fill in this vacuum has been, it must be admitted, only partially successful.

Z.F. is a dedicated and renown conservationist and nature lover and recognised as such throughout the world and awarded a Padma Shree by our country. Moreover, he is a writer and correspondent of considerable skill. After perusing through a simple account of a morning's outing by Zafar Futehally the reader feels that he has actually been present and participated in that outing. This seems to be a sort of gift which cannot be acquired by mere copying or imitation.

Therefore it will be readily seen that a mechanical engineer like me cannot be anything but a poor substitute especially when hampered by a chronic power shortage which compels me to work every week end and have an "off" in the middle of the week when no one else is available to do a sport of bird watching.

Now for the great news which is that once again Mr. Zafar Futehally is taking over the production of the Newsletter. His address is :-

Dodda Gubbi Post,
Via Vidyanagar,
BANGALORE 562 134.

Therefore from now onwards all pending articles and notes will be forwarded to him.

In the next Annual General Meeting of the Field Club it is proposed that this transfer will be formally ratified.

CORRESPONDENCE:

The Painted Partridge on Grassland round Nagpur Airport.

Mr. R.K. Bhatnagar (October Newsletter) points out that the large areas of scrub and grassland round airports provide special conditions of wildlife.

I have noticed for the last few years that the land round Nagpur Airport has attracted increasing number of Painted Partridge, and this year they were extremely vocal from about the middle of the monsoon till the end of October. From an hour or two before dark till well after sunset they took up positions on shrubs or the posts of the airport boundary fence and kept up a chorus of what sounded to me like a plaintive "What to do? What to do?" repeated regularly every 10 or 12 seconds.

In spite of many attempts to approach them no bird let me get nearer than 40 or 50 yards without flying off, but otherwise they remained put till the end of the performance. They did not seem to mind the jeep which patrols the runway.

According to the Handbook of Indian Birds it is uncertain whether the female, which usually has white on the front of the neck, also calls. One of the birds I saw definitely had a white throat, and several others apparently had.

(Mrs.) R.W. Ghate.

An Appeal.

I would like to convey my gratitude to Mr. Mangalik for his brief observation (NL, October 1975). I hereby make an appeal to other birdwatchers to report on similar observations which will help to estimate the frequencies of various mutant genes in avian populations. In fact, a large-scale ornithological survey should be conducted to estimate the rate of spontaneous mutations in avian populations which will throw considerable light on the genic variation in these populations and help in the understanding of the process of Natural Selection.

Partha P. Majumder.

A Point to Wonder?

On the verandah of my house, a mirror is hung on the wall which is used for shaving purposes. Two common sparrows (Passer domesticus) have built a nest on one of the ventilators of a room adjoining the verandah. These two sparrows spend long hours of the day pecking the mirror. I have been watching them perform this feat for over a month now. The obvious explanation for this performance of theirs is fighting against the 'enemy' ('intruder'?) visible on the mirror. I often wonder why it takes them so long to learn that they are wasting their energy for nothing!

Partha P. Majumder.

* * *

"Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary in Summer" by R.K. Bhatnagar, published in July issue, reads more like an "Inspection" note by an officer visiting a work site. He has written the least about birds and more about other items. I have not visited the Sanctuary but it is difficult to imagine a situation in a Bird Sanctuary where only 1 Sparrow Small flocks 2, Brahminy mynas 3 and 17 crested larks and 5 common babblers were seen in April. Probably, the time was also restive. I had an opportunity of travelling in Bhiwani & Mahendragarh Dist. (comparatively rainfall areas and where no protection is provided), for 2 days during late June, 1974 wherein I could easily see a large number of birds, most prominent amongst them was the "Dove".

Mr. Bhatnagar's comment about the sign boards is very relevant - these should be very prominent.

I would agree with Mr. Bhatnagar on his comments about the 'Out of context' design of watch towers, rest houses and lodges in many of our national parks and sanctuaries. It is heartening to note that the towers in this sanctuary are beautifully designed.

Coming back to the birds, I am sure that there is a check list of birds in this sanctuary with the Game Warden, Divisional Forest Officer, Gurgaon, Conservator of Forest, Southern Circle I.F.S., Conservator of Forest, is an enthusiastic Bird Watcher and would certainly help in the preparation of such a list, failing which the Newsletter could request its readers in the region to prepare a monthly or seasonal list to help Bird Watchers, visiting the sanctuary. It would be desirable that Shri Bhatnagar's comments are forwarded to D.F.O., Gurgaon and Conservator of Forest, Southern Circle, Hissar for their attention.

H.N. Mathur.

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